

## INTRODUCTION: TWO STUDY CASES AT UIC

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The general project is committed to look for alternatives that can help universities and colleges to develop a more substantial partnership with communities that represent the backgrounds of under-represented (first generation) and low income students. The general study targets exemplary university-community partnerships and community-based learning initiatives that have been successful in improving educational outcomes of under-represented students.

What follows are two case studies of such university-community engagement. The notion of engagement is captured in a case study of ‘internal’ diversity programming and success where the notion of ‘first generation, low income student ‘success’ is measured in the ways in which a public, urban, research university tries to create programs of high success for first generation, low income, students of diverse ethnicities and means. In this case the UIC Honors’ College (HC) has almost forty percent of its student base in Pell status and over twenty percent of its students in traditionally diverse and under-represented categories. At the same time the UIC HC has a set of programs and tools that make the overall HC graduation rate a bit over 88%. The second case is an ‘external’ case where UIC is but one of a number of colleges and universities in Chicago from the perspective of ‘the community’ where The Resurrection Project (TRP) is a community partner of the Great Cities Institute of UIC. The case study is of TRP’s La Casa where students of low and moderate means, mostly Spanish-speaking, come from the neighbourhoods of Chicago to live at La Casa, a student housing project of TRP with a full complement of student services and a special bi-lingual resource center designed for each resident-student of La Casa to ‘succeed.’ In exchange there each student must now provide forty hours per academic year of volunteer ‘community work’ in direct, indirect or advocacy service in La Casa’s version of the TRP model of community engagement.

The notion on an ‘engaged institution’—inside or out-- requires new models and new modes of engagement or community work—the HC at UIC and La Casa are models of such activity.

In sum, the case of UIC the study will evaluate these experiences through focus groups with the two initiatives currently operating both inside and outside the university. The first one, internal to

UIC, the Honors' College (UIC performance site) includes campus and community engagement as part of its institutional mission statements. The second one, external to UIC, is La Casa La Casa Student Housing (non-UIC performance site) I an initiative of a UIC community partner The Resurrection Project –TRB- to provide underrepresented and low income students from different universities (including UIC) the opportunity to build a community and attend college. The proposed model in the La Casa case attempts to surround students in the broader Chicago community with the benefits and resources of on-campus living together with the advantage of an on-site Resource Centre.

A second document, including the HC focus group results is included. The La Casa focus group has yet to be set up due to a long-awaited IRB/UIC survey approval process and the close of the academic year.

### **Case Study One: Honors' College at UIC**

Different from traditional undergraduate programs, Honors programs address goals of academic enrichment, leadership, institutional engagement and the commitment to excellence. To achieve these goals they engage in different teaching approaches and various ways of mastering academic subjects. Each Honors College (HC) program can have a different approach regarding institutional context, faculty involvement, student and academic profile(s) and particular needs of students. However, they share an approach that favors close contact between students and faculty, small courses and seminars, including one-on-one instruction, collaborative (peer or team) work, individual research projects, internships, study abroad, and campus and community service/engagement.

The HC at UIC is a community of students and faculty committed to academic excellence, campus and community engagement, and leadership experience. Its students achieve graduation rates higher than the average at UIC demonstrating how this program provides the necessary resources and support for students' success. Furthermore, the Honors' Senior Capstone research project is so identified with outcomes that suggest that membership to the HC has a stronger and more positive effect on underrepresented minority students than other students. The UIC Honors College is one of the most diverse in US with about 20% of the entire college being underrepresented students.

#### ***I. People***

According to the 2013-2014 annual report, the Honors College totals 57 Faculty Instructors, 356 Faculty Fellows, 1588 College Students, and it had 300 College graduates. Not only is the UIC Honors College highly diverse but the numbers show increasing racial/ethnic and gender diversity as well. Under-representation and diversity extended from the students and faculty to the academic

curriculum. The college has made a special and active effort to recruit faculty from underrepresented disciplines as well as ethnicities.

Diversity background

Category	Overall UIC Faculty Fall 2011	H.C. Faculty Fall 2010	H.C. Faculty Fall 2011	H.C. Faculty Fall 2012	H.C. Students Fall 2012	H.C. Students Report 13-14
African American	59 (4.8%)	17 (5.7%)	15 (5.2%)	18 (5.8%)	83 (6%)	6%
Asian American	213 (17.5%)	41 (13.9%)	41 (14.1%)	42 (13.6%)	486 (32%)	35%
Hispanic	78 (6.4%)	16 (5.4%)	19 (9%)	18 (5.8%)	233 (16%)	16%
White	788 (64.8%)	213 (72.2%)	209 (72.1%)	225 (72.8%)	620 (42%)	38%
Unknown	N/A	8 (2.8%)	6 (2%)	6 (2%)	15 (1%)	5%
Women	476 (39%)	125 (42.4%)	126 (43.4%)	140 (45.3%)	906 (61%)	
Men	740 (61%)	170 (57.6%)	164 (56.6%)	169 (54.7%)	586 (39%)	
TOTAL	1216*	295	290	309	1492	

Source: UIC Honors College, Diversity Strategic Planning Document (2012) and Annual Report 13 | 14 (2014?)

The latest HC annual report also identified the financial need of HC students: 38% were Pell eligible last year meaning that almost 40% of HC students can expect little to no family contribution for their education. This report also states that while students in the college had an average of six-year graduation rate of 82% in 2013-2014 and the rate has increased to 88% for the following year. These numbers are significantly higher than the 58% rate for the entire university. Honors students are also stronger in other measures such as mean entering ACT scores, mean entering HS percentile rank, and mean cumulative UIC grade points average.

Applicants, as well as enrolled students, have increased in the last years. The total number of enrolled students the college has grown 25% since 2008 and still expects to increase the enrollment of African American and Hispanic students. Students at the college represent a significant percentage, or about 70% of all undergraduate university recipients of awards and scholarship.

Faculty members engage with Honors College in many different roles, as instructors for seminars and round tables, as administrative and programmatic fellows, and as part of the admission committee and other key committees.

## ***II. Institutional offer and support***

The college actually offers 35 Freshman Core Courses and additional 30 Seminars. It also works with the Guaranteed Professional Program Admission (GPPA) that provides additional fiscal and intellectual support for students. This professional support program is offered particularly to HC

students. For example, approximately 7.5% of the applicants to GPPA were admitted in 2013-to two new GPPA programs in law in partnership with IIT-Chicago Kent Law School opened in 2014.

The college also engages in a variety of support methods that include attention to early signs of ‘trouble,’ both from student-faculty interactions and from student-residence hall issues. While such issues are engaged through early assignment of faculty fellows, increased outreach from college advisors, and coordination with other programs in the campus, these support services also serve as sources of possible ‘trouble’ as well..

The president’s Award Program – Honors (PAP-H) focuses on recruitment, admittance and retention of eligible under-represented students in the college. Scholarships, through PAP, are given to incoming first-year students (i) from historically underrepresented groups, (ii) from low-sending Illinois counties, or (iii) from families that cannot contribute to their child’s further education. The PAP program covers full tuition, housing, a two week summer program, a special first-year introductory seminar program, and a new laptop.

Beyond the courses and seminars, the first-year experience, for all students at the Honor’s College, includes a series of activities and programs addressed specifically to retaining students and making them feel fully connected to the entire university community from orientation onward: there are ‘honors ambassadors’ for the incoming students, welcoming events, a first-year ‘introductions’ seminar for all students, in-depth freshman advising, and ‘walk-in’ and ‘on-going’ evening advising.

Additionally, the college ‘partners’ in the different departments in the campus are designed to provide undergraduate research opportunities. Nearly 30% of honors students conduct research before they graduate. The honors capstone project is one the flagship programs at the college and at UIC more generally. It is an in-depth examination of a defined topic guided by a research supervisor in the student’s ‘major’ department that culminates with a written thesis and public presentation. In 2013-2014-- 95% of the honors’ class completed such a project.

Beyond the work in the classroom, students have access to a wide range of facilities at the college including kitchen, student lounge, study spaces, computer labs, coy services, tutoring center, student organization space. The facilities at the Honors’ College were fully renovated in 2013.

### ***III. Community engagement***

The Honors College is a lead member of the multi-university Chicago Collaborative for Undergraduate Success. It is also part of Thrive Chicago—a group of universities and non-profits organizations that work together to promote the success of the non-profits and the students in the city.

The college also has been engaged in creating innovative programming with peer institutions. In 2014, UIC's HC hosted the Honors Education Meeting for the Committee on Institutional Cooperation, it also founded the Honors in Higher Education Journal and participated in the planning committee for Honors Education at Research Universities in 2015. It is also part of the National Association of Fellowship Advisors, and The Illinois Academic Advising Association.

In addition to these examples of institutional engagement, the college's high impact practices of student-based civic engagement include student internships, writing and editorial experiences, and professional development opportunities. Community-wide events include freshman convocation, faculty-students luncheons, a college ball, and college-community lectures, among others. A series of extracurricular initiatives include artistic events all around Chicago as well as the lecture series in which students engage city leaders in discussions of the future of the city. Additionally, the HC sponsors different student organizations specifically designed to promote campus and community engagement and urban leadership and different student journals. The NBC homework online tutors allow HC students to directly engage with high school youth in the Chicago area. This program, specifically, has been running for 16 years with UIC Honors student volunteers.

### ***IV. History of the program***

Designed to provide opportunities for academically superior students, the Honors program started at UIC in 1958 and its first class arrived in 1959. By 1962 the program was expanded, becoming a four-year school and its scope was extended as well.. With the change from a 'program' to a four-year school. Special lectures and events were added for students and, as the discussion above indicates, there has been a steady increase in these activities and their integration into the overall practices of UIC as the school matured. By 1976 after a university-wide discussion about the continuity of the program, a committee evaluation gave support to its continuation. In 1980 the council proposed to transform into University College which was approved in 1982. In 1997, a UIC Senate committee proposes a cut to the priority registration program and the college loses access to priority registration, this same year enrollment reaches 1350 students.

### *V. Strengths, weakness, and challenges*

The UIC Honors College is an option for undergraduate students seeking additional academic challenge and extra-curricular opportunities. Is a community that engages in academic activities that start in the classroom but extend beyond the campus? The courses are, on balance, small in size, thereby giving students the opportunity to interact more directly with faculty. A great number of UIC faculty volunteer each year to work with HC students, in a host of teaching, advising, mentoring and research roles. Honors College students are seen as leaders, innovators and contributors to the UIC and the greater Chicagoland community.

The Honors College offers different scholarships based on both merit and need, scholarships are also available to support research and study abroad opportunities. One of the biggest strength is the access to mentoring. During the freshman year students are involved in different core courses that together with the professional advising provide solid support for the transition from high school to college. At the end of this first year, each student is assigned a faculty fellow that also could serve as an advisor and career mentor. From the sophomore year on, students are required to complete an 'honors activity.' This 'activity' is supplemental to traditional academic curriculum. As mentioned before, these extracurricular 'activities' include but are not limited to: research, study abroad, honors courses, independent study, service learning, and tutoring.

The new HC diversity planning document identifies one aim of the college to enlarge the number of under-represented faculty as well as students. It also suggest that while this is a core goal of the HC, the college has found it difficult to achieve this goal due to the limited number of under-represented faculty in the tenured and tenure-track composition in the entire university. However, the numbers presented here also show one anomaly: how under-represented faculty in the college nearly mirrors the population of UIC for African –Americans, but *not* for other ethnicities. The diversity report also identifies the need to increase the number of under-represented students not only in terms of ethnicities/races and academic majors but also along gender, sexuality, disability, and other lines. The college is strategically trying to address such weakness by directly engaging other units and cultural centers on campus. Also the UIC HC is using such strategies of engagement to identify underrepresented students within the College who can be 'Ambassadors.'

To make diversity one of its central principles of HC, the college has engaged not only in the organization of extracurricular events such as workshops but also in embedding issues related to

diversity in its curriculum and courses. As a result of such strategies, the graduation rates for under-represented students in the college are higher than comparable rates for under-represented students outside the HC and in the university, as a whole.. However, the College has identified a problem in terms of retention of minority students. The overall retention data are included in the following Table.

Trends in first-to-second year retention rates for underrepresented students

Year of Entering Cohort	African American 1 <sup>st</sup> to 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year Retention Rate			Hispanic 1 <sup>st</sup> to 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year Retention Rate		
	All AA Students at UIC	Those who spent 1 <sup>st</sup> year in Honors College		All Hispanic Students at UIC	Those who spent 1 <sup>st</sup> First-year in Honors College	
	Retained At UIC	Retained At UIC	Retained in Honors College	Retained At UIC	Retained At UIC	Retained in Honors College
2009	75%	93%	64%	79%	86%	59%
2010	74%	100%	55%	77%	88%	67%
2011	67%	91%	59%	74%	84%	76%

Source: UIC Honors College, Diversity Strategic Planning Document (2012)



***Case Study Two: La Casa Students Housing at The Resurrection Project***

La Casa student housing is a 6-story building located at the intersection of 18th Street and Paulina in Chicago. La Casa is an initiative of The Resurrection Project (TRP), a community organization based in Pilsen area in Chicago that since 1990 is working to empower community and through organizing, education, and community development. One of the programs offered by this organization is La Casa student housing which targets students pursuing a four-year degree in any

Chicago university or college. This is a model of affordable housing for students that aims to bring together the campus experience and the advantages of an on-site Resource Center. The resource center provides support and services that will help students to adapt to college life while offering them leadership skills. Student residences are located on floors 2 through 6.

### ***I. People***

La Casa is available only for undergraduate students pursuing a first bachelor's degree. Students residing in La Casa must maintain full-time enrolment in a two to four years academic program in an accredited university or college in Chicago. Students enrolled at a community college would be considered when they are intending to complete a bachelor's degree.

In terms of diversity, La Casa is defined as an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution that does not engage in discriminatory practices in terms of race, religion, gender, nationality, disability, among other. Moreover, La Casa provides accommodation for students with disabilities following the state and federal laws.

Students at La Casa are enrolled in different universities and they live together, often using peer support to develop activities that will help them to achieve college success. This program is addressed mainly to low- to moderate-income students groups which, as studies have demonstrated, have more barriers to college success than any other group. La Casa combines affordable housing, a collaborative and learning environment, a resource center, and a network of staff who are professionals in developing student services. The staff is committed to supporting each, individual student college journey through the professional development of academic success, personal growth, and leadership development.

Three important roles at La Casa are: (1) the Director is responsible for coordinating all activities and supervising the entire staff. The director works in collaboration with staff at TRP to ensure a living and learning environment conducive to academic and personal growth of the students. As a member of TRP, the director also promotes engagement with the community and the creation of effective partnerships with all the universities, colleges, high schools, and other organizations that the student(s) may be affiliated with. (2) The second key staff member at La Casa is the Student Support Coordinator. The coordinator is responsible for planning and coordinating activities regarding academic preparedness and tenacity, financial aid, and career knowledge. The coordinator works with external partners to create academic, professional, and leadership opportunities for La Casa student

residents. He/she is also responsible for ensuring matches between residents and mentors as well as internships sites. (3) The Resident Assistants are responsible of each floor, they serve as community builders, informal listeners, facilitators, program planners, and peer mentors to students. They are the day-to-day contact persons for residents and are considered the key to the success of the programmatic goals.

## ***II. Institutional character and support***

The facilities are located near all major colleges and universities in Chicago area. Although they are not inside one specific university or college they provide an affordable, dorm-like, living experience. They offer accessibility to major means of transport, quiet places to study, and include all utilities in their annual fee along with free Wi-Fi & Cable. Their location as mentioned before offers a unique neighborhood experience in Pilsen. Each floor has two fully-furnished dorm suites, with a full kitchen, living area with ceiling to floor windows, and bedrooms. There are five rooms per suite accomodating 2 students per room. Every lounge provides a large-screen TV, chairs, sofas, and a dining table. The first floor of the building includes the mail room, resident services desk, fitness center, and laundry room.

Additionally, La Casa has an on-site resource center with supportive services and a professional, trained support staff. This center not only offers an environment for study and meeting other students but also services for internship placement, mentorship opportunities, leadership development, student support services, access to peer and professional networks, a computer lab, writing center, and campus connection to each student's university or college.

La Casa also provides a series events designed for finding, applying for, and paying for college; and specialized workshops to build skills in studying and time management, among other services. All these services are offered bilingually-- in both English and Spanish. MANY universities use the resource center's support service space to carry on admission workshops. Particularly, La Casa partners with the organization, *New Futuro*, to improve the educational prospects of Latino families.

La Casa also offers financial assistance through the Student Housing Scholarship Fund, which provides funds to Illinois students that (1) live in the La Casa units, 2) have graduated from an Illinois high school within the last 6 years; (3) are presently enrolled, full time, in a degree granting program at an accredited Illinois college or university --that is the university or college is a member of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools--, and/or (4) demonstrate financial need. Scholarships

are paid directly to the student's rent account and are reviewed annually. Additionally, La Casa provides residents with information and liaison to apply for other scholarships outside the Student Housing Scholarship Fund's program.

In sum, La Casa offers a full range of academic and personal tools for success to students who are attending college. . Each resident at La Casa will develop, with assistance, a self-defined road map to college 'success.' This 'road map' seeks to provide students with educational advantages and to promote *service* as a means of creating a sense of pride and investment in the community.

### ***III. Community engagement***

As mentioned before, La Casa is an initiative of The Resurrection Project, a community- based organization working for a long time in Pilsen. Residents of La Casa are expected to participate in the different activities that make the program a living-learning community initiative.

Beginning in the 2014-2015 academic year, the La Casa Scholarship Program is requiring the fulfilment of a community service requirement. Each scholarship student in their freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior year will be required to complete at least 20 hours of volunteer service per term or 40 hours throughout the year. This requirement is designed to promote dedication to 'social responsibility and citizenship,' and it is meant to allow students to learn 'new community engagement skills' while continuing to build upon existing ones. Through this volunteer work, it is hoped that each La Casa student will be exposed to new (community engagement) perspectives and different ways of thinking about issues within the community.

This new requirement offers different definitions of commitment to 'community work:' (1) One mode of such work is through what La Casa calls "Direct Service." Direct Service includes working directly with community members in, for example, mentoring children within the community, or assisting the elderly, or working in shelters for the homeless or visiting hospitals, or helping at other community centers. (2) Another mode of 'community work' at La Casa is called 'Indirect Service.' Indirect Service includes working on a project which impacts the community such as disaster relief, or urban revitalization, or environmentally focused projects, or fundraising organizational efforts, or food drives, etc. (3) A third category of 'community work' for students at La Casa is called 'Advocacy Service.' Advocacy Service is more activist- oriented and includes working for the alleviation of a community problems such as community violence and homeless, or engaging in political activity at community level.

#### ***IV. History of the program***

This is a rather new program that is completely organized and run by a community partner of UIC, The Resurrection Project (TRP). What is really very important is the notion of engagement at UIC is a reciprocal one. La Casa suggests that the notion of reciprocity is not focused on one university and a community but on a community and any of the universities and colleges that serve the community and, in turn, are served by the community. The notion of diversity requires a multi-university engagement and, in turn, a community wherein the place, or in this case Chicago, is represented by a supportive array of universities and colleges. At La Casa UIC is firmly represented as are several other colleges and universities in the Chicagoland area.

Without a focus group the following video will have to do:  
RESURRECTIONPROJECT/MEDIA/TRP-TV

#### ***V. Strengths, weakness, and challenges***

Couldn't find info of evaluation

#### **References**

UIC Honors College, 2012, Diversity Strategic Planning Document

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