

Elevating Access and Attainment Efforts

To meet DePaul’s strategic goal to be a national leader in recruiting, retaining and graduating a diverse student body, with an emphasis on first-generation and low-income students in the Chicago area, the university required a more clearly defined and robust access strategy built on partnerships with Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and Catholic schools to ensure clear pathways to a DePaul education for targeted populations, along with innovative approaches to student selection that enable the university to more effectively predict student success.

Therefore, existing efforts within the Division of Enrollment Management and Marketing were elevated and expanded to establish the Center for Access and Attainment in April 2008. The center aims to focus campus dialogue, planning and action concerning student access, and lead a partnership-based enrollment strategy with Chicago schools to attract high-quality students who would otherwise not have access to a DePaul education. Working closely with Institutional Research and Market Analytics (IRMA), the center provides research on issues of access and attainment that stimulates campus, community and international discourse; cultivates institutional and community partnerships to guide students through the process of preparing, applying and enrolling in college; delivers pre-college programs for underserved college-bound students; and administers the university’s federal TRiO programs for low-income and first-generation students.

Fostering Dialogue around Access and Attainment

The Center for Access and Attainment produces research and papers and hosts meetings and symposia centered on issues of access and attainment. Some initiatives include:

- Collaborating with IRMA to release reports analyzing college admission activity, profile and academic performance data and trends about students from Catholic and public high schools in Chicago as well as throughout Illinois.
- Hosting Catholic higher education institutions from across the nation for the biennial symposium, “Balancing Market and Mission: Enrollment Management Strategies in Catholic Higher Education.” The symposium brings together enrollment and mission leaders to discuss the balance between mission aspirations and market realities as they shape enrollment strategies and outcomes. Also highlighted are institutional commitments to diversity in enrollment strategy as a manifestation of mission as well as Catholic values and identity as revealed in institutional marketing and communications.
- Hosting leadership from Catholic high schools for an annual Balancing Market, Mission and Recruitment symposium. Leadership in Chicago’s Catholic high schools—presidents, principals and directors of admission, development and advancement—come together to focus on balancing market position and Catholic mission as it relates to recruitment and planning in high school enrollment strategy.

Developing Partnerships and Pathways to DePaul

The Center for Access and Attainment serves as a resource and partner with Chicago area Catholic schools, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and other educational organizations that prepare students for higher education. The Center’s Office of Community Outreach also cultivates community partnerships to foster high school to university transition for students from diverse cultural and socioeconomic groups within the neighborhoods of Chicago.

Examples of these partnerships include:

- Working with CPS to host two annual International Baccalaureate (IB) program events: the “In Our Own Words” week-long oral history workshop for students from immigrant families and the IB Summer Academy, an intensive four-day program designed to prepare IB juniors for selective college admission. IB is an academically challenging curriculum that is recognized by universities across the world. As part of a commitment to improve the quality of education in Chicago, IB is offered in an increasing number of CPS high schools serving highly diverse populations.
- Partnering with the Cristo Rey Network through activities such as providing high school achievement data for students enrolled in Cristo Rey schools, hosting student events and professional development programs for teachers and administrators and providing office space for the Cristo Rey Network’s national office. Cristo Rey

Network is a national association of high schools that provides quality Catholic college preparatory education in communities with limited educational options. DePaul is a founding university partner with Cristo Rey.

- Connecting with the community organization Target H.O.P.E. (Healing, Opportunity, Pride and Empowerment) to host enrichment classes in math, English, communication and African-American studies on DePaul's campus on Saturdays. Target H.O.P.E. is a privately funded college preparation and mentoring program for African-American high school students in grades 10 through 12. The program provides students with graduate workshops, leadership retreats and college tours.

Managing Federal GEAR UP and TRiO Programs

The Center for Access and Attainment manages three federally funded programs designed to increase access to postsecondary education and attainment of a baccalaureate degree for low-income and first-generation college students: GEAR UP, Student Support Services and the McNair Scholars Program. While student financial aid programs help students overcome financial barriers to higher education, TRiO programs help students overcome class, social and cultural barriers to higher education.

GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) was established by the U.S. Department of Education to increase the number of low-income students prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. DePaul provides postsecondary transition programming and outreach for GEAR UP participants and is a partner in the Chicago GEAR UP Alliance that includes five other universities, a city college, CPS and numerous agencies. The alliance serves 15,000 high school students in 21 public schools across Chicago. DePaul's component of the citywide program involves outreach to GEAR UP schools and campus programming to improve college awareness.

Student Support Services (SSS) is intended to increase the college retention and graduation rates of its participants and help students make the transition from one level of higher education to the next. The program does this by providing enhanced academic and other support services to undergraduate DePaul students who are low income, first generation and students with disabilities to guide them through the timely completion of a baccalaureate degree. In 2010, SSS at DePaul was funded for another five years.

The McNair Scholars Program prepares carefully selected undergraduate students who are first-generation and low-income, or who are members of underrepresented groups, for doctoral study and entrance to academic careers. The program provides opportunities for undergraduate research, faculty mentoring and study abroad, as well as intensive advising and assistance with the graduate school admission process. The McNair Scholars Program works closely with McNair participants through their undergraduate requirements at DePaul, encourages their entrance into graduate programs and tracks their progress to successful completion of doctoral degrees. In 2012, McNair Scholars at DePaul was funded for another five years.

The Center for Access and Attainment also manages DePaul's Arnold L. Mitchem Fellowship Program, which reflects the philosophy and activities of the current McNair Scholars program. Launched in 2011, the Mitchem Fellowship Program extends McNair's capacity primarily by serving two categories of students not eligible for McNair: those who do not meet TRiO's stringent income and first-generation status eligibility criteria, and those who aspire to faculty careers in medicine and other STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields where the Ph.D. may not be the terminal degree. Each year, the program will provide stipends to approximately 50 qualified undergraduates to engage in value-added educational activities that will improve their awareness of graduate school and academic careers, strengthen their preparation for graduate school admission, and extend the faculty networks at DePaul and other universities to facilitate students' successful transition to graduate school and beyond.