

Part 2: Mission + Values



UIC's mission, in its most elemental terms, encompasses teaching, research, service, and economic development. But the essence of our mission—our deepest values—resides not in a simple statement but in who we are, where we are, and what we believe.

Who We Are

UIC is proud of its role as a gateway of intellectual and social discovery, especially for those students who might not otherwise attend a top-rank research university. Our faculty, staff and administrators understand this role and embrace the opportunities it offers. We eagerly commit ourselves to educating the citizens of Chicago, Illinois and the world, providing access to an educational and scholarly environment of uncompromising excellence.

Our measure of success is not the test scores of those we admit but the accomplishments and quality of those we graduate. We expect that our undergraduate students deserve and receive the most ambitious education a research university can provide, whether they enter UIC through traditional gateways or special programs. We insist that our graduate and professional students, who will be among the best in the nation, receive training in the most ambitious, challenging, important, and timely projects in their disciplines.

If it is difficult for some of our undergraduates to meet these expectations, we should reach out to schools and community colleges to actively ensure that students are better prepared when they arrive. We will support students once they do arrive to ensure that they flourish here. Above all, we will make sure that the education undergraduate, graduate and professional students receive at UIC is worth the effort we will demand of them, and that it involves them with the crucial ideas and skills of our time. For our students, UIC will be more than a point in their journey of intellectual growth; it will be a life-long resource for new opportunities and intellectual renewal.

To those who say UIC has to choose between our commitment to making education accessible and our commitment to being a world-class research university, we answer: This is a false choice, and UIC is replete with examples that refute it. Our mission demands that we embrace both commitments, using the tensions between them as springboards for our own achievement. Indeed, our greatness will be because of these tensions and not despite them. One of our primary goals must be to continue not only to develop excellence in a wide range of programs but especially to develop excellence in programs that enable us to understand our particular situation and to act as a mechanism of change.



Without question, UIC faculty must be selected from the most qualified, accomplished and promising anywhere. They should be leaders in their fields who will propel the scholarly reputation of UIC in their respective academic communities. They will, of course, be good teachers. But more than that, they must be teachers committed to working with any student, from any social or economic background, who has the ambition to elevate him or herself intellectually. We believe that this commitment to intellectual development will enrich our institution and all its students and faculty.

The Accomplishments and Quality of the Students We Graduate

It is not enough for us to merely assert that the measure of our success is the value we have added to our students' lives as they graduate; we must devise mechanisms to assess the value-added outcome for every UIC student. Today, a number of UIC campus units provide valuable support to particular populations of students as they move through their academic pathways. Examples include LARES, AAAN, ODS, GPPA and the Honors program. However, no matter how effective these programs are, more must be done to address the needs of the entire student population. The practices and success of these programs will be drivers of, as well as embedded in, a broad network of external educational institutions (such as K-12 schools and community colleges) and the academic units within UIC so that we build strategic, integrated pathways for all students to achieve their academic goals.

One starting point is the present campus effort to arrive at a new model for General Education at UIC designed to serve as a foundation for lifelong learning. Another is the Academic Assessment Committee organized to identify and record the mechanisms UIC has in place to build the students pathway to academic success. Beyond these early efforts, we must continue to explore avenues to improve the value of a UIC education and make evident the outcomes, using these results as input to improve our educational programs.

While a major research institution will have gifted people and strong programs in the core disciplines, UIC must also excel in new areas of knowledge, which increasingly cross traditional academic boundaries and deal with important, real-world questions. Research in these new areas can exploit our unique mix of talent and resources; for example, from a campus rich in cultural differences, we will draw scholars committed to working across disciplines to explore the notions of culture and difference. Throughout UIC, increased cooperation and collaboration among disciplines can give rise to new knowledge.

New knowledge will also come through our engagement with the city, the nation and the world—an expansion of the Great Cities Commitment to encompass the worldwide physical, social and intellectual communities of the 21st century. The nature of Chicago, with its extraordinary mix of people, assets and challenges, will focus these activities in a way that will uniquely define UIC. For example, the rich constellation of science, technology and entrepreneurship found in Chicago, including major national laboratories and commercial research facilities, puts an unparalleled opportunity at UIC's doorstep.

To make good use of all these opportunities, UIC will have to become a fully integrated university—an institutional whole—offering innovative, interdisciplinary partnerships along with essential disciplinary scholarship. We must have a faculty, staff and student body who, whatever their field, will be excited by the specific challenges raised at UIC and by the opportunities to build new disciplinary, regional and global relationships to develop and share new knowledge.

The Ways We Teach and Learn

In seeming contradiction in a university at the forefront of scholarship, research and technology, the ways in which we teach and learn do not always fully embrace and benefit from the tools that the 21st century can provide. This must become a focal point for UIC. To live up to our commitment of access to excellence, we must bring to bear all available ways of increasing access to knowledge. We must ensure excellence through a culture of assessment and feedback. One of the best ways to guarantee that these changes occur is to recognize and appreciate the hidden effort involved in developing programs that support the visible teaching and that provide constructive evaluation of our performance.

New Knowledge

New knowledge advances the status of any field of study by placing different epistemologies and sets of knowledge in a new dialogue that produces unique perspectives, solutions and understanding of our lives, society and the natural world. UIC, due to its remarkable and diverse attributes, can make distinct contributions to the production of knowledge in the following ways:

At the frontiers and interfaces of existing knowledge and disciplines

Through collaborative work that brings together vernacular and academic sets of knowledge

Within the inherent tensions and potential influences between pure and applied knowledge

In the application of cutting-edge paradigms to areas of knowledge that have been constrained by traditional world views or research approaches

Between interdisciplinary spaces

In participatory action research

In community service learning initiatives

In knowledge that articulates the local with the global

For new knowledge areas to flourish and grow, however, we require the intellectual, physical and administrative structures that support it. We must create flexible administrative structures that will facilitate these interactions, as well as give official institutional recognition and value to such hybrid, creative practices, such as through the tenure process and intramural awards. Without these major shifts in current practice, the promise that is UIC cannot be fulfilled.

Where We Are

UIC seeks to be not only a great university in a great city but a premier urban institution. We will be an actual and virtual destination for the world, from the university community to those who live and work nearby to scholars and visitors from afar. For UIC the notion of “community” is wide-ranging and inclusive, offering opportunities for scholarship, cultural exchange and human enrichment.

In 2010, UIC will be defined by its partners as well as its faculty, students and staff. This means we must engage those outside our boundaries: the university’s neighbors, urban civic leaders, business leaders, patients, tourists and sports fans, lovers of music and art. Through partnerships in and with other great cities of the world and their universities, UIC can participate in creating the global and local networks of knowledge, interdisciplinary inquiry and meaningful economic, civic, cultural and social relations that will impact the world and our understanding of it.

To be a great urban institution we must be sensitive to the aesthetic, economic and social challenges of designing and developing the 21st century city—beginning with our own campus. UIC is located on over 250 acres in downtown Chicago. At its heart is a powerfully conceived and highly controversial design. The campus is one of the leading examples of Utopian campus architecture—one that demonstrates both the failure and the promise of grand urban design. It was one of the most passionate architectural statements about the urban future, and it now requires an equally passionate commitment from the university community to ensure that we fulfill our obligations to become a major urban institution.

Like any major campus, the physical landscape of UIC will always be a work in progress. Its development has to support not only the future of higher education, but the future of the city and of our university as an important and active site in the city. If we ignore these challenges UIC cannot become the major urban destination, or the great university, it aspires to be. We therefore urgently need to attend to the physical spaces of our campus, indoor and out, and to their planning, structure and use.

UIC will also serve as an open and inclusive site for debate about the urban future of its neighbors and its city and about the global forces that are transforming urban life. We will be especially cognizant of our own role in these transformations. We will seek to be a critical leader among urban research universities in a collaborative, global network of universities committed to the idea of Great Cities.

The Great Cities Commitment

The Great Cities Commitment stems from the unique opportunities presented by the location of UIC in the heart of one of the world's great cities—Chicago. In the 21st century, through communication, transportation and interdependence, the notion of “city” is broadened far beyond the physically-based entity. Rather than a single site, the “great city” of the 21st century is as much a network of relations as it is a single place—a network bridging the local with the global. For UIC, this notion of ‘cities’ reflects worldwide networks of geographic, social and intellectual relations that become the source of new communities of scholarship, research, international education and collaboration. UIC’s particular place in the city of Chicago and its involvement in the life of these 21st century cities will increasingly define the institution as an example of the world-connected university. By 2010, this opportunity will be fully recognized, embraced and have become a signature element of UIC.

What We Believe

Certain core values are so essential to educational life at UIC that they inform every element of individual and institutional practice. The very best of what UIC can become by 2010 will be imbued with the values of:

Knowledge

Access

Openness

Excellence

Collaboration

Knowledge that leads to global as well as individual transformations

Let there be no doubt: the central value of UIC is knowledge—the creation of knowledge through scholarship and research, and the sharing of knowledge through teaching, application and practice. We are especially committed to scholarship, research and teaching that reinforce the mission of UIC and add value to the city and the intellectual world—knowledge that can transform the global society just as it can the everyday lives of our students.

Access to excellence

Our vision of a more egalitarian society requires an unstinting commitment to access to excellence. We have already noted the debate over our core mission—whether we will be a university of access or an institution of academic excellence. Many public research universities resolve this dilemma by paying lip service to access and student diversity while celebrating loudly their goal of becoming an elite institution. Other institutions establish themselves as “urban universities” dedicated to providing access to diverse urban student populations, but without laying claim to the goals of a world-class research institution.

UIC will distinguish itself by the precept of access to excellence. We seek to be a leading urban public research university, providing a decidedly diverse student population with access to world-class academic study. “Access to excellence” will serve as a guiding principle for higher education at UIC and for many of our partnerships and research enterprises.

Openness to the world of ideas and urban and global change

Some people view the university as an enclave where knowledge and wisdom can be pursued in an environment of isolated reflection. Others argue that the research university cannot be an ivory tower, and must be completely engaged with the world in which it is embedded. Neither view is entirely accurate.

Knowledge always has a context, and even in the most research-oriented universities, knowledge is not produced for students and faculty alone. At the same time, communities benefit from the scholarship pursued at universities in their midst, and they can contribute to the quality and significance of that scholarship. This is certainly the case at UIC, where we practice openness to all domains of knowledge and to the urban context and transformation that gives such knowledge its many meanings. Further, we believe that new knowledge, as never before, will require openness to crossing disciplinary and institutional boundaries where interdisciplinary, inter-institutional and cross cultural sites of discovery will be the platform for future invention, research and creativity.

Excellence in every facet of intellectual life and in the physical, cultural, developmental environment that sustains academic achievement

For UIC, excellence is not so much a goal as a value that informs our every practice. The students we attract must display uncommon excellence, achieved not only through formal academic measures but through life experiences that give them the passion to succeed at UIC. Our faculty will seek excellence in their research and scholarly pursuits and in their teaching, producing the best undergraduate and graduate students. The university as a whole will seek excellence in its collaboration with peer institutions, new partnerships aimed at higher scholarly accomplishment. The university will seek unparalleled excellence in the planning, design, architecture, administration and development of a great urban institution. UIC will seek to be the leading example of the engaged university, working in partnership with the people, institutions and businesses of Chicago and the world to achieve excellence in human, community and urban development.

Collaboration in scholarship, problem-solving and innovation

The culture of collaboration at UIC will encourage each of us to seek out cooperative relationships, leading us to a fuller, more efficient and more supportive approach to creating knowledge and teaching students. The partnerships formed in a collaborative environment will create new levels of interdisciplinary scholarship, new avenues of problem-solving in administration, the classroom and the lab, and new approaches to institution-building. This culture will also contribute to new forms of collaboration with the city and the state, and to collaboration with other universities in other Great Cities of the world.



Making the Vision of Access to Excellence a Reality

The theme of access to excellence runs through the entire 2010 report, from the opening vision statement, to the three strategic directions focusing on the UIC environment, people, and institution; but this commitment will only be realized if we keep one fundamental question central to every initiative that is understood to follow from this report:

Is what we are trying to accomplish consistent with UIC's vision, mission and values?

The 2010 report delineates a distinctive role for UIC among comprehensive research extensive universities. For example, while it requires us to guarantee students the full range of knowledge that prepares them for the 21st Century, it does not require that we do everything that every university does. In fact it directs us to decide which things we need to do, choosing those that will set us apart, and then doing them at the highest level. Every time we have an opportunity to set a priority, implement a plan, or make a key decision, we should consider whether the initiative is moving us in the right direction.

Is it something that UIC should be doing?

Is it something that UIC can do at the highest possible level?

If the answer to either of these questions is no, then we shouldn't be doing it.

