Professional Partners
DePaul has a robust tradition of students working with industry and community clients to gain experience, knowledge and connections that give them a head start on career paths. Whether fabricating hacker conference badges, creating an ad campaign for the Meta Quest 2 virtual reality headset or providing therapy for speech disorders, DePaul students work directly with external clients, gaining experience that helps them as well as aids community members and businesses.

Here are six examples that span educational and professional fields, showcasing how DePaul students build skills while serving vital needs.

**Designing Products**

DePaul’s Idea Realization Lab (IRL), a makerspace in the Eugene P. Jarvis College of Computing and Digital Media (CDM), is equipped with 3D printers, laser cutters and other resources for students to create and innovate. A recently formed student consulting team takes that hands-on learning one step further, using the equipment to test, prototype and deliver products for external clients.

Last spring, Idea Realization Lab consulting team members Amelia Schroeder (top), Charlie Trowbridge (middle) and Gabriel Rickabaugh (CDM ’22) (bottom, left, with Trowbridge) designed and built a video game arcade cabinet for video game designer and DePaul donor Eugene Jarvis.
Students in the select group, supervised by IRL Director Jay Margalus (CDM MS ’21), come from the lab’s student staff. The students, many of whom are pursuing a BFA in Industrial Design, gain extensive experience and a portfolio of professional projects even before they graduate.

“A lot of employers in the industrial design world want you to have experience in product pitches, business model canvases, market analysis and shipped products. I had that before I was out of college, which is kind of unheard of,” says Gabriel Rickabaugh (CDM ’22), who served as the group’s project manager. “We dove right into the deep end.”

The group has designed hacker conference badges equipped with interactive game consoles and provided user testing and design recommendations for projects such as a modular aluminum shelving unit.

Members are also collaborating with oncologists at the University of Chicago to design a microscope slide scanner that connects to a mobile phone and an app. “The intent is that people in developing areas who don’t have access to cancer screening can use this $60 device to scan slides with blood cells and help detect cancer,” Margalus says.

In spring 2022, DePaul’s Division of Advancement and External Relations enlisted the group to build a video game arcade cabinet with a console featuring games made by DePaul students. The team decked out the cabinet with flashing LED lights and covered side panels in original art renderings of characters and graphics from the games, then presented it as a gift to Eugene Jarvis after the pioneering video game designer and his wife, DePaul Trustee Sasha Gerritson (SOM ’99), made a landmark gift to CDM last March.

“He was a surprise client as well as an inspiration,” Rickabaugh says. “The standards he helped set for arcade-game design have a lasting effect we referenced while also beckoning in new technology.”

Treating Speech and Language Disorders
Each week, about 100 community members, from pediatric to geriatric clients, come to the state-of-the-art DePaul Speech and Language Clinic on the Lincoln Park campus. At the donation-based bilingual clinic, they get help for communication and swallowing disorders.

Graduate student clinicians supervised by doctoral-level faculty practitioners provide evaluations and therapy for a range of disorders and needs, from aiding articulation and speech-sound production for toddlers to teaching stroke survivors with aphasia to read again.

The clinic opened in fall 2021 as part of the launch of the Speech Language Pathology master’s program at the College of Science and Health.

“In addition to not charging or turning anyone away, what sets us apart is creating practitioners who want to serve the underserved,” says Dr. Treasyri Williams Wood, the clinic’s director. The students and the faculty are motivated to make a difference, improving clients’ outcomes as well as increasing their quality of life, she says.
Aiding Entrepreneurs
Students in the internship program at the Driehaus College of Business’ Coleman Entrepreneurship Center work alongside founders of startup companies.

The summer internship provides them with mentorship, fresh skills and a front-row view of the challenges entrepreneurs face in launching new ideas, along with a $2,000 stipend and course credit from DePaul.

“We worked on pitch modulation, resonance, intonation patterns and where the voice is presented in the body,” Chin says. “We cultivated a comfortable place for him to talk about things he’s feeling, his insecurities. He told us, ‘I’m so happy to have come here. I love how I sound.’”

Rachel Chin, a graduate student in the program’s first cohort, worked with a transgender client to provide gender-affirming voice care, which involves using visual and auditory biofeedback equipment to help individuals find a voice that’s authentic for them.

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the business,” says Jake Bolger (BUS ’22), who supported sales, market research and logo design for SplitPass, a peer-to-peer mobile app developed by Alex Plonsker (BUS ’17) that lets users buy and sell unused gym memberships and classes.

Ilayda Bilgin (BUS ’22) grasped the nuances of trade-show product pitching for a grown-up version of an arcade-style claw machine game conceived by Russ Gottesman (MBA ’11) for events such as weddings and corporate parties. In the game, players maneuver a claw to grab a mini bottle of alcohol.

“It’s a childhood classic with an adult twist,” Bilgin says. “Who wants to win a plush toy when you can grab a cute little bottle of booze?”

Bilgin helped Gottesman, who also founded a company that displays GPS-enabled ads on public transit, with marketing campaigns and social media promotions. “Russ taught me about PR and how to reach clients,” she says, “and that I don’t have to confine myself to one business as an entrepreneur.”
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Teaching Music
For nearly three decades, the music education program at DePaul’s School of Music has partnered with a Chicago public or Catholic school for its practicum program. Juniors in the program, under the supervision of Director of Music Education Jacqueline Kelly-McHale, plan and lead weekly 30-minute lessons for their assigned classrooms throughout an entire academic year.

The practicum program gives students immersive preparation for senior-year student teaching. It also provides elementary schools with music education they may lack.

Classroom ensembles include egg shakers, hand drums and tuned percussion tubes. “Our lesson plans involve a mixture of activities — kinesthetic, oral, visual — to make sure students are getting a lot in that half hour,” says senior Ruben Stasevsky, who completed the program last spring at Hamilton Elementary School.

“We try to understand their school culture, personal and family backgrounds, along with what they listen to, and plan our lessons accordingly.”

Building community and honoring diversity are also key motifs. “We want to create a safe and welcoming space for all types of students,” says Mitch Barrett, another senior who taught at Hamilton. “Music class lets kids express their emotions and individuality and share joy and community with others. That’s so important for developing minds and has been especially so during the pandemic, which left some kids developmentally behind.”

Creating Ad Campaigns
Students in the College of Communication’s Public Relations and Advertising program learn about the entire ad campaign process, from strategy and planning to creation and presentation. As part of that, student teams work like an advertising agency to create an ad campaign for a prominent company and compete in the American Advertising Federation (AAF) National Student Advertising Competition.

Strategic pivots are often part of the challenge. Facebook, rebranding as Meta in fall 2021, gave 2021–22 team members a client brief to market its Meta Quest 2 virtual reality headset to young adults.

“We initially pursued a mental health angle, because the device has apps for meditation and stress relief that we thought would connect with college students,” says senior Lily Lowndes, the team’s strategist.

When reports surfaced about Meta’s inaction on research showing its Instagram platform’s negative psychological impact on young women...
and girls, the team refocused on ways the product could help users reconnect with friends, activities and places they’d missed during the COVID-19 pandemic. “It was good real-world experience, because not every client is going to be perfect, and that’s the nature of the business,” Lowndes says.

The DePaul team took third place at its district level after presenting its market research and creative work to a panel of judges from AAF and Meta. Although they didn’t advance to the national competition, it was the journey that mattered.

“The program gave me more confidence in my skills,” says senior Aaron Monroe, the team’s copywriter, “and in my ability to succeed in the industry and learn how to work as a team over 22 weeks.”

Tutoring Kids and Teens
On a weekly basis, often for an entire academic year, DePaul undergraduate and graduate students work with K-12 students from the surrounding community to help them with reading, math and science homework and other academic needs, such as planning for the SAT. The sessions are part of an extracurricular volunteer tutoring program that’s grown by leaps and bounds at the Education and Counseling Center (ECC), housed within the College of Education (COE).

“We started with 15 families in fall 2021, and by the following spring we’d served almost 100,” says Courtney Romero, a COE PhD candidate and graduate assistant who manages the program. “We provide sliding-scale financial assistance and never turn anyone away.”

Tutors are often COE students pursuing careers as teachers and counselors, but students in health sciences, finance, art and music have also lent their expertise.

“Having a diverse population of DePaul students expert in different fields expands the breadth of subjects we can cover,” says ECC Director Kathy Iwashima.

Tutors receive training that extends beyond teaching specific skills. “We’ve also developed curriculum for academic mentorship, which helps kids set goals and plan for the future in a systematic way,” Romero says.

Sustaining a tutor-student pairing over months also supports social and emotional engagement, she says. “The virtual-learning yo-yo situation during COVID took a toll on learning. This consistency helps rebuild confidence through empathy.”

And when students use their empathy—and their solid skills—to aid real-world clients, it’s a real win for all involved.