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Match Making: Creating More than the Sum of the Part(ner)s

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DePaul's spirit of innovation is nowhere more apparent than in the ways it partners with Chicago organizations to meet community needs while crafting meaningful educational experiences for students. DePaul uses partnerships to raise academic quality, jump-start new programs and maximize its strengths. Partnerships are central to achieving DePaul's strategic goal of deepening its bonds with Chicago. “Instead of building things fresh, we partner with people,” says the Rev. Dennis H. Holtschneider, C.M., DePaul’s president. Here are some of the notable partnerships created during the past decade.

THE ALLIANCE FOR HEALTH SCIENCES

In 2008, Michael Welch, M.D., had a proposition: Merge DePaul and Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science (RFUMS), one of the nation’s largest graduate schools of medicine, which is located in North Chicago. Welch, president of RFUMS, wanted graduate students with a strong liberal arts background because he believes they make more empathetic practitioners.

DePaul’s fast-growing preprofessional health program seemed like the perfect source. DePaul’s counterproposal: the Alliance for Health Sciences. Created in 2012, the distinctive alliance has numerous components. Undergraduate students in DePaul’s College of Science and Health take classes and get career advice from RFUMS faculty practitioners. Select students serve as research assistants at RFUMS, a rare opportunity for undergraduates. The institutions share faculty and collaborate on joint research.

More than 260 DePaul undergraduates are enrolled in the Pathways Honors Program, which provides accelerated admission into six graduate programs at RFUMS, including medicine and pharmacy. Participants save a full year of college, decreasing costs and beginning their professional careers sooner.

“I couldn’t be more appreciative of the opportunity DePaul Pathways has given us,” says Alexa Zajecka, who is finishing her health sciences degree from DePaul while simultaneously beginning her master’s degree in physician assistant practice. “Now that I’m in my first year at RFUMS, I completely understand the relationship between the two universities: they share not only the same teaching style, but also the same values in that students are focused, open-minded, respectful and eager to help the community.”
DePaul had another counter-proposal when the Archdiocese of Chicago asked DePaul to lend its name to Gordon Tech High School: Let DePaul help improve the academic quality of the school instead.

“We saw an opportunity on the corner of California and Addison to make a difference,” says Rob Karpinski, associate vice president for external initiatives at DePaul. Under Holtschneider’s direction, DePaul invested faculty and staff time and resources over three years to turn around the struggling school, which was renamed DePaul College Prep in 2014. Through the academic partnership with DePaul and the implementation of the International Baccalaureate program, the overall academic quality and perception of DePaul College Prep has improved significantly, Karpinski says.

Revitalizing the high school made perfect sense, says Mary Dempsey (JD ’82), former Chicago Public Library commissioner and a DePaul trustee, who also is president of DePaul College Prep.

“Father Dennis has said many times that the future of the Catholic Church requires strong Catholic elementary and high schools as well as colleges and universities,” she says. “That’s how you educate people to remain part of a vibrant and active faith that embraces Vincentian values.”

DePaul dramaturgy/criticism major Yasmin Mitchel, center, chats with Elijah King, left, and Jalen Presley before they conduct interviews for a documentary and for historical content for the Chicago History Museum.

DePaul College Prep welcomes students from both Catholic and public schools on Chicago’s northwest side.

According to Gary Johnson, president of the Chicago History Museum, DePaul’s 2012 educational partnership with the museum is the most frictionless membership program he’s ever known. DePaul students, faculty and staff get free admission and museum discounts simply by showing their university ID. Even more significant, museum staff create tours and make archival material available to dozens of DePaul classes throughout the year. The museum is a frequent stop for freshmen during Discover Chicago and Explore Chicago courses.

“Our museum becomes your museum,” says Johnson of the DePaul partnership. “You can come to the Chicago History Museum and learn a lot about economics, learn a lot about social life, learn a lot about sociology. You can learn about all kinds of subjects here, because it’s your city.”
Right now, an estimated 1,200 people in Chicago are “unsheltered.” That means they’re sleeping on park benches, under viaducts, in vacant buildings or other places not meant for human habitation. In three years, that number is expected to be zero. That’s right—zero.

Zero is also the projected number of unsheltered people living in several other major cities around the world in the next three years. DePaul is helping to make it happen.

“The Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH) would not exist without DePaul University, which has been an extraordinary partner to us,” says Dame Louise Casey, advisory committee chair for the institute and a lifelong leader in the field. “Before our partnership, IGH was a dream by leaders working to end homelessness across the world. There was nowhere for that dream to take root, grow and really exist before DePaul stepped in.”

IGH is a collaboration between the university and Depaul International, a London-based charity that supports marginalized people and those experiencing homelessness in six countries. Founded in 2014, IGH is the first worldwide organization and global advocate dedicated to ending homelessness. It curates best practices for reducing homelessness, is creating common definitions and measurement standards, and soon will launch an online research hub. It also nurtures community advocates and educates political leaders.

Fittingly, DePaul first gave IGH a physical home. It also provided crucial infrastructure, faculty consultants, mentors, research support, interns and student workers, and more.

“Being surrounded by smart people from different disciplines and experiences and being able to draw on their varied talents has been incredible,” says Kat Johnson, IGH director. She says the institute became fully operational much faster at DePaul than it could have independently. Now Johnson is exploring ways to further involve DePaul faculty and students in research and education.

In June, IGH will launch an initiative to help 150 major cities provide shelter for all their inhabitants by 2030. A pilot group of cities will seek to end street homelessness by 2020.

“None of this would have happened without DePaul,” Casey says.

Kat Johnson is the executive director of the Institute of Global Homelessness. The organization is a partnership between DePaul and Depaul International, a London-based charity, to help end homelessness across the world.

CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL UNION

Echoing the alliance with Rosalind Franklin University, DePaul became educational partners with the Catholic Theological Union (CTU), the largest Roman Catholic graduate school of theology and ministry in the United States, in 2011. Students and faculty members from each institution may take classes, teach and do research at their counterpart. DePaul students are able to start their graduate studies at CTU while finishing their undergraduate degree at DePaul, saving time and tuition and beginning their careers sooner.

“Through this alliance we help the local church and the universal church in ways that make sense for us as an educational institution. Because of our scale, we can easily give advice and other assistance that has a real impact at CTU as well as benefiting DePaul,” says the Rev. Edward R. Udovic, C.M. (LAS ’76), senior executive for university mission, secretary of the university and vice president for teaching and learning resources.
DePaul’s film and television program took a giant leap forward when Fr. Holtschneider championed the university’s partnership with Cinespace Chicago Film Studios, says David Miller, dean of the College of Computing and Digital Media.

“DePaul’s facility at Cinespace has really been a game changer for our program. We’re providing exclusive opportunities that no other program can offer,” says Miller. In 2013, the studio and DePaul’s School of Cinematic Arts created a dedicated production facility with classrooms, soundstages, and equipment and collaboration spaces. They added another 12,000 square feet last year.

At Cinespace, students work alongside industry professionals creating popular TV shows such as “Empire,” “Chicago Fire” and “Chicago PD” and film their own productions. This collaborative atmosphere gives students unprecedented access to professionals and vendors on the Cinespace campus.

The partnership was central to the Hollywood Reporter ranking DePaul’s program among the top 20 film schools in the nation for two years in a row. Film and television is now the most popular major for freshmen entering DePaul.

“Chicago has seen a renaissance of sorts in the film and entertainment industries in recent years with Cinespace Chicago leading that charge,” says John Corba (CDM MFA ’15), director of DePaul Cinespace Studios. “There’s really no other film program like this.”

**AMERICA’S URBAN CAMPUS**

“Higher education as a sector has a tremendous economic impact on the city and a tremendous impact on workforce development,” says Fran Casey, DePaul’s director of community affairs. DePaul and the Chicago Loop Alliance conducted studies in 2005 and 2009 that documented the multimillion-dollar economic contribution universities made to the South Loop neighborhood, to the delight of civic leaders.

Harnessing the power of that partnership, DePaul led the way in creating America’s Urban Campus, a coalition of 22 of Chicago’s largest higher education and nonprofit institutions that is unique in the nation.

“We are the pipeline between the universities and the businesses in the city,” says Casey. Instead of competing, member institutions focus their collective resources on complex urban issues. Civic leaders, researchers, employers and marketers gain insights into Chicago’s 224,000 students and swiftly connect with nearly 50,000 faculty members through the coalition.

“It goes to the heart of Father Holtschneider’s leadership,” says Terry Mazany (DHL ’11), president and chief executive officer of coalition member The Chicago Community Trust. “He recognized that there’s strength in collaboration and in linking together as institutions with common interests.”