

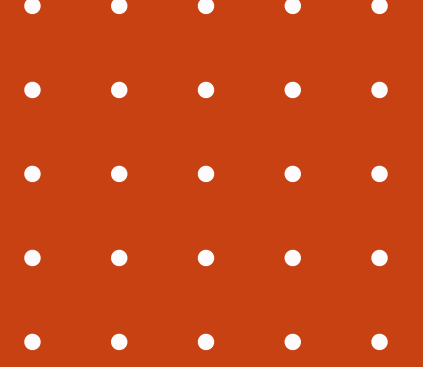
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Community Engaged Scholars

Empowering students to meet the needs of the Champaign-Urbana community

2025 - 2026 Academic Year Report



We CU supports service learning instructors in creating impactful learning experiences for students through project matching with community partners, trainings, mini-grants, and service recognition.

We CU works with the Community Learning Lab in the School of Social Work to connect instructors to local community organizations. Since 2020, We CU has supported 203 service learning courses, and 4,335 students have completed 1,006 service projects and 85,910 service hours for community organizations in East Central Illinois and beyond.



Principles that guide our work:

Experience: We CU offers students hands-on experiences and workshops that build new skillsets, perspectives, and networks.

Impact: We CU supports instructors and students in meeting community needs.

Reciprocity: We CU centers the needs of local community partners and builds mutually beneficial partnerships between instructors, students, and community organizations.



2025-2026 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS



608

**Student
Participants**



23

**Service Learning
Classes**



14,192

**Total
Service Hours**



91

**Community
Projects**



92

**Community
Partners**



Campus-Community Compact

We CU is supported by the Office of Public Engagement and the Campus Community Compact to Accelerate Social Justice. Our team is committed to working collaboratively toward campus-community empowerment.

Economic Development

Rhetoric students helped create a digital newsletter for Strides Shelter to publicize their outcomes, impact, and economic development opportunities.
(Spring 2026)

Inclusive Education

Students assisted teachers and staff with special needs classroom management, conflict resolution, and record-keeping for Two by Two Learning Center.
(Fall 2025)

Accessible Technology

Students created a digital flipbook, so the United Way can direct community members to resources. (Fall 2025)



Campus-Community Compact

We CU's partnership with the Community Learning Lab leverages student enthusiasm and campus resources to create positive local change. Students gain valuable experience.

Health, Wellness & Resilience

Students volunteered with the CLU-W Hygiene Pantry of Champaign County, distributing hygiene kits to unhoused individuals in our community.
(Spring 2026)

Workforce Development

Graduate students researched and designed a program evaluation plan for SOAR, an enrichment program for youth and teens.
(Spring 2026)

Community Relations

Students partnered with the Immigration Project to connect immigrants and refugees to legal and social services. (Spring 2026)





“I would like to thank We CU and the CLL for supporting me and my students this semester by providing us the opportunity to work with and serve community partners! This partnership was also the motivation for a group of my students to reignite the Statistics in the Community registered student association and connect with the community outside the classroom.”

Alexandra Chronopoulou,
Clinical Associate Professor
Department of Statistics



Scholar Recognition

This year, 153 students from 11 colleges earned recognition as We CU Community Engaged Scholars! These students dedicated more than 15,391 service hours to local organizations in our community.



We honored this year's We CU Scholars at our April 23 Reception at the Alice Cambell Alumni Center. Scholars received a certificate and enamel pin to wear at graduation. We are so proud of these students' dedication to our community!





We CU and CLL partnered with Cunningham Township to build care packages for unhoused people in our local community. We CU scholars, faculty, and community members built more than 100 care packages during our Spring Reception!

“Your thoughtful care packages brought relief, dignity, and hope to the people we serve. For many, these items were more than supplies—they were a reminder that their community sees them, values them, and cares about their well-being. Thank you for helping us uplift those who need it most.”

Marco Price

CARES Program Manager, Cunningham Township





“I have grown both personally and professionally through my service. Whether I’m giving instructions at activity stations or answering questions from visitors, serving at Champaign County Forest Preserve District has helped me become more confident interacting with people of all ages. I’ve also learned how to adapt, and service has strengthened my ability to clearly share information, engage others, and collaborate with a team. Overall, these experiences have made me more confident, dependable, and adaptable, and service has reinforced the importance of community.”

Skye Thomas
2026 We CU Scholar



Humanities in Action

The Humanities in Action Program, which we offer in collaboration with the Humanities Research Institute and CLL, completed its fourth year. This spring, a cohort of 7 students dedicated more than 350 hours of service. Their efforts built stronger community relations, made education more inclusive, and helped improve our community's health and mental wellness.



Humanities in Action

The Humanities in Action students also learned about HRI's different opportunities for undergraduate students, and they participated in biweekly professional development workshops. Workshops featured guests from LAS Career Services, the Women's Resource Center, staff from the Graduate Employee Organization, and The Odyssey Project. The Humanities Research Institute and the McKinley Foundation graciously supported HIA programming this spring.





“Service has really changed the way I understand community needs. Before, I thought helping meant giving people what I thought they needed, but now I realize that real service starts with listening. My work at the New American Welcome Center has taught me to approach service with more humility and awareness. I now understand that helping is not about ‘saving’ a community, but about supporting and working alongside people. I’ve learned to be more empathetic, to ask questions, and to respect what people say they need instead of assuming.”

Jacqueline Mejia
Spring 2026 HIA Scholar



Mini-Grants

We CU gave out more than \$2,500 in mini-grants to students and instructors. Professor Aurore Mroz is one of three service learning faculty who received a grant. She used it to support a FrancoFun Kids @ UIUC event this April.





“This mini-grant helped us bring 200 elementary students from Yankee Ridge, Stratton Academy, and Urbana 6th-Grade Center, and their teachers and families to campus for a celebration of French-speaking culture. The FrancoFun Kids @ UIUC program fosters the teaching and learning of French across generations of students and creates a community of practice around the mentoring of French. The idea behind this event is to foster neighborly and mutually beneficial relationships, so we can promote inclusivity on campus for kids who might not have had the opportunity to consider that they, too, can go to college on a big campus like ours.”

Aurore Mroz
Associate Professor
Department of French and Italian



Grants and Awards

We CU received three grants to support our programming this year. These grants helped We CU reach new student and faculty audiences.

Provost's Initiative on Teaching Advancement

We CU received a \$10,000 PITA grant to expand outreach among service learning instructors. We CU used the funds to create an online Service Learning Toolkit and create a campus database of service learning instructors.

The Educating Character Initiative

We CU received a \$50,000 capacity building grant from Wake Forest University's Educating Character Initiative. We CU used the funds to build campuswide support for The Alma Project, which will expand and support service learning instruction at Illinois.

McKinley Foundation

We CU received a \$1,000 Community Grant from the McKinley Foundation to support Humanities in Action programming. We CU used the funds to provide dinner for our students at all our cohort meetings this spring.



We CU Team



Emily Stone
Director



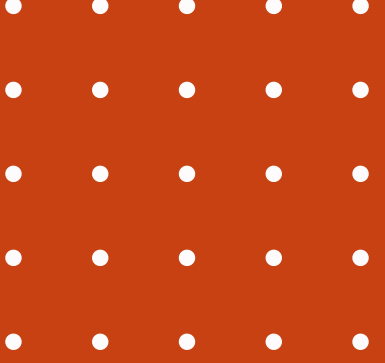
Katie Shumway
Director



Olivia Hagedorn
Program Manager



We CU Team



Yunzhe Zhu



Vera Mak



Lázaro Garcia
Angulo



Christopher
Getowicz





We CU is grateful for the support of the Office of Public Engagement and the Campus Community Compact to Accelerate Social Justice. The School of Social Work, College of Education, Humanities Research Institute, Interdisciplinary Health Sciences Institute, and the University of Illinois Alumni Association also support We CU programming.





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