CPS COLLEGE BRIDGE AT DEPAUL UNIVERSITY
1998–2009
The **CENTER FOR ACCESS AND ATTAINMENT** at DePaul University was established in 2008 to serve as a focal point for dialogue, strategy and action concerning college access and attainment, consistent with the university's mission-based goal to exceed national norms in enrolling and graduating a diverse student body, with a particular emphasis on low-income and first-generation students in the Chicago area.

Housed in the Division of Enrollment Management and Marketing, the Center coordinates the division’s community outreach and partnership activities, manages the university’s TRiO programs, produces papers and reports on college access and attainment and hosts seminars and forums for campus and external audiences. Specifically, the Center administers the following programs:

- **COMMUNITY OUTREACH** cultivates institutional and community partnerships to foster high school to university transition for students from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic groups in Chicago.
- **CATHOLIC SCHOOL INITIATIVES** cultivates partnerships with Chicago Catholic schools to support enrollment through pre-college and other partnership and pathway programs.
- **STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES (SSS)**, a federal TRiO program, provides advising, academic assistance, mentoring and career-related services to eligible first-generation and low-income undergraduates to improve retention and degree attainment.
- **MCNAIR SCHOLARS PROGRAM**, a federal TRiO program, prepares highly qualified undergraduate students who are first-generation and low-income, or who are members of underrepresented groups, for doctoral study and entrance to academic careers.

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For better than a decade, more than 1,600 Chicago Public Schools (CPS) students took DePaul University up on its offer to start college early in a dual enrollment program that ran from 1998 to 2009. The CPS College Bridge program provided a unique opportunity to academically prepared juniors and seniors to enroll at one of several colleges and universities in the Chicago area that were partners in this transformative education initiative. The goal from the beginning was to provide advanced coursework to students who had limited or no advanced curricula opportunities at their respective high schools. DePaul was an early participant in and supporter of the program.

As an institution founded to make a quality education accessible to qualified students from disadvantaged backgrounds, DePaul’s partnership with CPS in the College Bridge program fit well with our institutional mission. We also welcomed the diversity of thought and experience—not to mention age and community—that students brought with them to class, enriching learning and providing us with an opportunity to engage promising students early.

With the financial belt-tightening that has befallen CPS, it could not have been easy to make the decision to end the program. However, one would be hard-pressed to find a similar program where all parties—colleges, CPS and students—gave and received so much in pursuit of the goals of college preparation and degree attainment.

On the pages that follow are data gathered about the CPS College Bridge program at DePaul. While reading, you might envision the hundreds of students who took on the challenge, not only of additional classes, but accelerated and rigorous course work. These students gave up significant amounts of their time, often in the evening, commuting miles from home and school to DePaul. In return for their hard work and sacrifice, students earned college credit that enabled many to save on college costs.

Having served as director of the CPS College Bridge program at DePaul since its inception, I recall a program that coaxed many students out of their comfort zones and planted them on the campus of this great teaching institution, boosting their confidence and easing their transition to college.

Glenna Ousley
Director, Community Outreach
Center for Access and Attainment
DePaul University
The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) College Bridge program was a dual enrollment program that provided the opportunity for qualified high school students to take courses at participating colleges and universities. The program operated from 1998 to 2009 when it was terminated due to budget cuts in CPS.

DePaul was one of the six founding partners with CPS for the College Bridge program and remained the largest university partner, with more than 1,600 participants over 11 years.

Participants were selected for the program based on their grade point average, history of school attendance and counselor recommendation. As at other participating institutions, DePaul “mainstreamed” the high school participants with university students in regular first-year and, where appropriate, more advanced courses. The courses were offered free of charge to participants.

The program was split-funded between CPS and participating universities. This involved a substantial investment on behalf of partner institutions—DePaul underwrote more than two-thirds of tuition costs by the final year of the program. DePaul also provided a full-time staff member through the Office of Community Outreach as well as student mentors, many of whom had participated in the program when they were in high school.

College Bridge participants at DePaul underwent an extensive orientation and advising process before being placed in courses. In many cases, they were also required to take university placement tests to assess their readiness for particular levels of coursework. Throughout their time at DePaul, participants had full access to tutoring and university facilities such as the libraries, computer labs and writing centers. To celebrate participants’ achievements, DePaul hosted an annual banquet for students and their families as well as a number of on-campus activities throughout the year to encourage engagement with the program and the wider campus community.

Between 1998 and 2009, the Division of Enrollment Management and Marketing contributed over $3 million to the success of the CPS College Bridge program through student scholarships for program participants, staffing, student mentors, office space and operational support.
The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) College Bridge program was both a reflection of the growing national interest in dual credit and dual enrollment programs as well as a collective response to a specific local challenge: how to improve postsecondary access and attainment for students in Chicago. This report summarizes and celebrates the program’s achievements over the course of 11 years from the perspective of just one partner institution: DePaul University. However, its contents may have wider relevance because of the large number of students who participated in DePaul’s component of the program.

Dual credit programs began to grow in the United States in the 1970s and had expanded considerably by the 1990s. Along with rigorous academic programs such as International Baccalaureate (IB) and the College Board’s Advanced Placement (AP), they were, and are, part of the blurring of boundaries between high school and college curricula.

In Illinois, as in the nation, opportunities to participate in dual credit programs were less likely to be found in big cities and under-resourced communities. Many programs were geared more toward students entering technical or other two-year college institutions rather than baccalaureate colleges and universities. But in Chicago, opportunities to access AP or IB programs were limited even though CPS had expanded access to both over the past decade. Indeed, the establishment of the CPS College Bridge program, along with the expansion of AP and IB, and the introduction of college-readiness programs such as AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), addressed directly the most important barrier to college access and degree attainment in the city: access to high-quality curricula and educational experiences.

While the prevailing assumptions about educational policy over the last decade or so have focused on issues of school choice, testing and accountability, each of these initiatives reminds us that what really matters relates to the classroom, the curriculum and what students are learning.

The objectives of dual enrollment programs are essentially to:
• expand access to advanced curricula for high school students;
• facilitate the transition from high school to college;
• reduce the time to baccalaureate degree; and
• enhance the relationships and continuity between high schools and colleges.

It is hard to think of four objectives more relevant and central to the needs of schools and students in Chicago. In embracing them, the CPS College Bridge program represented a highly strategic approach to postsecondary access in Chicago.

Did it work? While this brief report only speaks to the DePaul experience and is by no means a comprehensive research study, there can be little doubt that the CPS College Bridge program had a significant impact in terms of turning college aspirations into reality for a substantial number of students. The following pages provide some evidence of why we think this is so. While the data speak for themselves, it is perhaps through the voices of student participants, parents, counselors, administrators and faculty that the value of the program can be most clearly appreciated.

My experience as a College Bridge student was wonderful! From the very beginning, I was able to interact with college students, professors and even people from the financial aid and admission offices. I learned what it would be like to be in college firsthand.

I decided to take public speaking, multimedia and Web design, business calculus, and microeconomics as a Bridge student because I knew they were required courses for any business major in college. They were all classes that I knew I could benefit from in high school, too, and that I could list on college applications.

My microeconomics class was the most challenging. We were divided into study groups to meet throughout the whole course. I didn’t tell anyone that I was still in high school. We all worked hard and worked together as we studied for each test. We each ended up getting around the same good grades, so it was a great experience to know that I succeeded in the class just like the college students.
I had five College Bridge students in an upper-level French course on French poetry a few years back. Even though the material was challenging, all of them were eager to learn and improve their skills. While a few were a bit shy about participating in the discussions—the course was a 300-level French course, after all—they all contributed to the course in positive ways. I recall a couple of their class presentations as being very polished works. It is clear in my mind that the CPS College Bridge program attracted the very best students from the Chicago Public Schools. For these students, it gave them the invaluable opportunity to pursue academic work in areas that were not offered in their schools.

Two among the five students were extremely strong, and one, truly exceptional. In fact, in this class of some 25 students, all of whom were either French majors or minors, this CPS College Bridge student ranked at the very top. Not only was his French fluent, but also his critical abilities were extremely sophisticated. He was able to quote in Latin, to establish links between different French poets and various literary periods, and was a real intellectual driving force in the classroom. I think he benefited our learning environment tremendously by stimulating the rest of the class and pushing the other students to excel.

We so often pay little attention to our top-end high school students. We assume they need very little to succeed and so we give them little. I was one of those students 35 years ago; I very nearly went down the wrong road out of the boredom I felt in my high school classes. If I had been able to look forward to taking a college course or two before graduating, it would have made a big difference in my motivation to succeed in other classes.

The CPS students I have met have been as engaged, as competent in literacy, and as strong as critical thinkers as the average DePaul freshman. It was a pleasure to work with them. Please send more.
Enrollment in advanced coursework in high school is one of the most powerful drivers of college access and completion. With the expansion of selective enrollment high schools, the establishment of IB programs and the broadening of AP offerings, more CPS students now have access to such coursework. But the supply still does not meet the demand. The CPS College Bridge program was a strategic partnership with several Chicago-area postsecondary institutions to help broaden access to advanced coursework in college settings. As seen from the following indicators, the levels of both student enrollment and academic performance were impressive.

- Between 1998 and 2009, 1,624 CPS College Bridge participants took 2,346 college courses at DePaul.
- Sixty percent of College Bridge participants at DePaul were from schools other than the selective enrollment high schools.
- DePaul's program drew students from across the city. The top five participating non-selective enrollment high schools were Mather, Morgan Park, Curie Metro, Kenwood Academy and Sullivan. The top selective enrollment high schools were Jones College Prep, Whitney Young Magnet, Northside College Prep, Lane Technical and Gwendolyn Brooks College Prep.
- The top subjects for College Bridge enrollment at DePaul were mathematics, sociology, psychology, languages and philosophy.
- College Bridge participants performed well in DePaul courses with 33 percent earning an “A” and 80 percent earning at least a “C” grade. In mathematics, 89 percent of participants earned a grade of “C” or better.

I decided to apply to the College Bridge program because I wanted to get ahead in high school and college. I wanted to get AP credit and increase my GPA, and I also wanted to get college credit early. My teachers recommended that I take sociology and psychology because they are usually required courses for all college students.

It was hard to balance my high school and college work, but I disciplined myself and I was really successful in all my courses. The classes are intense and your professors expect you to do the required reading and your homework. Psychology was my toughest class, but I got help from my professor and I got a good grade out of the class. I had to cut back on hanging out a bit, but the sacrifice was totally worth it.

My daughter, Simone, speaks French fluently, and I did not want her to lose her French. She went right into A.P. French her freshman year. There was no place for her to go after that course at Jones so I started researching. I was able to take the learning experience a step further, further her learning and further her love for French at a college level by encouraging her to enroll in the College Bridge program.

The impact of the College Bridge program in Simone’s life was three-fold: first, it gave Simone the experience of going to college; second, it gave her an incredible level of confidence because she was able to receive A’s and B’s in college-level courses; and third, it helped her socially because she was able to interact with college students without them knowing that she was still in high school. She had the benefit of a college education at a much higher and more intense level.
Students sometimes have unrealistic expectations of college. Their sources of first-hand information and support may be limited, especially if they are from first-generation college families, or are attending schools without a strong college-going culture or with under-resourced college guidance. As research from the Consortium on Chicago School Research has shown in recent years, the road to college for many talented and hard-working CPS students is by no means straightforward. The CPS College Bridge program tackled this issue in the most direct way possible by placing students in college classrooms and environments. For many participants, this clearly made a critical difference.

The following indicators are for students who both participated in the CPS College Bridge program at DePaul and subsequently enrolled at the university.

- Almost 10 percent of College Bridge participants enrolled at DePaul as new freshmen for undergraduate study. DePaul was the top college destination for College Bridge participants.
- The rate of admission for College Bridge students applying to DePaul from 2005–2009 was 79 percent compared to an average of 68 percent for all DePaul applicants. By comparison, of CPS graduates who applied to DePaul from 2008–2009, 64 percent were admitted.
- Of other participants for whom we have college enrollment data, 86 percent enrolled in baccalaureate colleges and universities.

### Other College Destinations For DePaul College Bridge Participants

| 1 | University of Illinois at Chicago |
| 2 | University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign |
| 3 | Loyola University Chicago |
| 4 | City Colleges of Chicago—Wright College |
| 5 | Northeastern Illinois University |
| 6 | Northern Illinois University |
| 7 | City Colleges of Chicago—Harold Washington College |
| 8 | Roosevelt University |
| 9 | City Colleges of Chicago—Richard J. Daley College |
| 10 | Illinois Institute of Technology |

### TYNEKA HARRIS

DePaul University alumn
Project Leader, Division of Student Affairs
DePaul University
Morgan Park High School

My experience as a College Bridge student helped me to get to know the courses and the faculty in the College of Computing and Digital Media. Being in the classroom, getting to know DePaul’s Loop campus, knowing that the faculty cared and that they were there for me all helped me to realize that I wanted to study computer science in college, and that I wanted to go on to DePaul for my undergraduate and graduate degrees.

The faculty and staff really had a big influence on me as a College Bridge student and as a DePaul student. I wanted to find a way to support those who support the students. Now that I’m in my career, I’m able to mix my technical expertise in computer science with my passion to help the people who help students succeed at DePaul.
I observed a major shift in the way College Bridge impacted students’ lives. They became aware of how the college system works and many felt like they could transition from high school to college understanding that they are able to succeed. They also gained confidence that enabled them to express themselves in ways they did not know [before]. The Bridge program was well worth it to show the students that they have the ability to succeed.

MARINA MEDINA
Counselor
Northside College Prep

The key point is that College Bridge put CPS students on the same playing field as kids coming from other high school districts who have programs like the Bridge program all the time. It leveled the playing field. It prepared students for college and it told universities that the students were capable of taking part and succeeding in college-level academics. It helped first-generation students get their feet wet in college and helped them to explore so they would know what to expect in the future. It also made CPS students more attractive to universities, and it kept them competitive.

AURORA DIAZ
Counselor
Gwendolyn Brooks College Prep

The kids were exposed to students already in college and they learned the game. They learned how to talk to professors, how to anticipate exams, when to drop a class or when to stick it through. For first-generation students, this is a value that we cannot teach. You learn this in the classroom, in the actual setting.

BETTY CITADINE
Former administrator
CPS College Bridge Program
Chicago Public Schools
Participating in the College Bridge program made my daughter, Eboni, more interested in college. It made her more independent and more mature because she had to go to class without having me by her side. She went into a class that was diverse with different ages and was able to learn about teamwork. She learned leadership skills.

The program had great value for students because it gave them a head start at grasping college and college work. It also gave them a sense of responsibility because they had to go and take high school courses and then take college classes at night.

I discovered a newfound confidence in myself after participating in College Bridge. I was no longer worried about applying to college or getting in. I used to worry about whether college was really for me—being the first in my family to attend—but I didn’t worry about it after being exposed to it during my time in the program.

I couldn’t believe that the transition from high school to college was so seamless. All these thoughts and conceptions were demystified completely for me. I thought that in college there would be continuous lectures and intimidation, and it wasn’t that way at all.
There are some good reasons for extending the time to college graduation. Study abroad, internships and other out-of-class learning opportunities may extend the time to degree, but the benefits are likely to far outweigh the costs. However, for those who are less prepared for college, who have a more difficult time transitioning to college and who do not perform well in first-year courses, the extra time to graduation is likely to be seen mainly in terms of costs, both financial and educational. The evidence at DePaul is that participation in College Bridge was closely related to successful performance in first-year courses and timely progress toward degree.

- College Bridge participants at DePaul took less time to complete their degrees at the university, with 51 percent graduating in four years, compared to 39 percent of CPS graduates at DePaul, and 43 percent of all DePaul undergraduates.
- Of College Bridge participants enrolling at DePaul, 80 percent completed their bachelor’s degree within six years, compared to 60 percent of CPS graduates at DePaul, and 63 percent of all DePaul undergraduates.

When I was in middle and high school, I studied French but I wasn’t really interested in it. After one of my teachers suggested that I apply to the College Bridge program, I decided to continue studying language. But instead of French, I took Japanese, and it was a lot of fun. The class itself was really interesting and the students were really motivated. It was a very different environment from my high school classes.

I originally wanted to study physics in college, but after I met two or three faculty members in the Japanese program and saw that the students were really motivated, I thought that it would be awesome to study Japanese as my major—so I did!

During my sophomore year at DePaul, I studied abroad in Japan. I was a year ahead in my Japanese classes because I took them as a College Bridge student, so I was able to study abroad early as a sophomore instead of as a junior. I wouldn’t have had the opportunities that I had in college if I wasn’t in the College Bridge program.

Since graduating from DePaul, I spent two and a half years teaching English in Japan. It was an awesome experience, and I know that I’ll go back to Japan again one day.

 Killian Gray  
DePaul University alumnus  
Graduate student  
Digital Cinema, DePaul University  
Lincoln Park High School
As DePaul’s principal partnership activity with CPS for more than a decade, the College Bridge program anchored the university’s enrollment outreach efforts with CPS schools and provided an ongoing mechanism for CPS/DePaul communications, awareness and relationship building. On the most obvious level, it was a highly visible expression of the university’s larger engagement with CPS schools and provided a valuable communication network with CPS counselors and teachers. It had implications for DePaul’s enrollment from CPS that extended well beyond the size of the program.

- With an average of just under 150 participants a year, DePaul was the largest university partner in the CPS College Bridge program.
- With 331 freshmen in fall 2009, DePaul consistently enrolled more CPS graduates than any other selective, private university.
- In a number of cases, DePaul’s participation with CPS College Bridge led to specific high school initiatives to broaden access to advanced curricula.

The College Bridge program was the cornerstone of our high school program at Community Links. Students enrolled for dual high school and college credit, and it was an expectation that students excel in the College Bridge program in order to graduate successfully from our school.

Because students needed the College Bridge credit in order to graduate, we incorporated a late high school start time so students could attend classes in the early morning and then make it back to school for their high school classes. It made for a long day, many leaving for their college classes at 7:00 a.m. and finishing up their high school classes at 5:30 p.m.

The feedback we got from students has helped us tremendously to build our college preparation program and expose students to the rigor and excitement of college academic learning.

FRANCISCO BORRAS
Principal
Community Links High School

The counselors [at Jones College Prep] and Mrs. Danielle Colyer, a teacher at Jones who was in DePaul’s law program, wanted to get students into an academic sequence that matched the students’ interests and the school’s curriculum. They wanted to offer students additional opportunities that they didn’t have at Jones.

Jones had a law course sequence that started in 1998 and it made sense to partner with DePaul University’s College Bridge program. Jones was looking for a university that would offer students a higher level of learning, critical thinking skills and civic responsibility, and DePaul was a perfect fit. Jones’ students took a sequence that complemented their high school curriculum—courses specifically in law or civic responsibility. It was a direct connection with the high school sequence. It enriched the students’ experience.

The program also helped Jones with their high school curriculum. It provided informal and formal articulation sessions between instructors. It helped the school think strategically about what students needed at Jones. It also provided Jones an opportunity to see if they were really preparing students for college courses.

CYNTHIA BARRON, PH.D.
Former principal
Jones College Prep
The CPS College Bridge program served to increase postsecondary enrollment and attainment by providing qualified students with access to advanced coursework in college settings. While participating colleges and universities always saw the program in larger than recruitment terms, this was bound to be modified by the extent to which they contributed to the costs. In DePaul’s case, the program was clearly viewed as a potential pathway to enrollment, especially for students who might not otherwise have had the opportunity to attend the university.

The following indicators are for students who both participated in the CPS College Bridge program at DePaul and subsequently enrolled at the university.

- Almost 10 percent of participants at DePaul went on to enroll at the university as degree-seeking freshmen.
- Participants who enrolled at DePaul are more diverse than the DePaul population as a whole. Almost half are from first-generation families while two-thirds are from low-income households. In addition, 43 percent are Hispanic/Latino, 13 percent African American, 18 percent Asian and 24 percent White.
- Participants who enrolled at DePaul had an average high school GPA of 3.83, slightly higher than the DePaul average. On the other hand, their entering ACT average of 22.6 was lower than the DePaul average of 24.5.
- The majority (58 percent) of participants at DePaul enrolled in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, while 31 percent enrolled in the College of Commerce, 7 percent in the College of Computer Science and Digital Media and 5 percent in the School of Education.
- As shown below, overall graduation rates for former College Bridge participants at DePaul exceeded both CPS and institutional averages. College Bridge participants at DePaul were also more likely to graduate in four years than other CPS students at DePaul or, for that matter, DePaul freshmen generally.
- While College Bridge participants from selective enrollment high schools had the highest graduation rates, participants from non-selective enrollment schools also exceeded CPS and institutional averages.

As coordinator of the College Bridge program at DePaul University over the past four years, and as a participant in the program when I attended Bowen High School, I have first-hand experience of the benefits of College Bridge. Looking back, the program gave me the opportunity to enrich my high school career and aspire for an opportunity to attend college. I had the advantage of getting a “taste” of college before I attended full-time. As program coordinator, I was able to work with students, parents, counselors and DePaul faculty to make College Bridge as rewarding of an experience for the participants as it was for me.

College Bridge embraced the importance of providing opportunities for students who otherwise would not consider college. Together, CPS and DePaul have made a positive impact on several generations of college students.
WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

We hope that this report will encourage other efforts to examine the postsecondary enrollment outcomes of the CPS College Bridge program. Still, the findings summarized here are likely to be representative of participants at other partner institutions if only because DePaul accounted for so many of the participants at the university level.

We know that the CPS College Bridge program made a difference in the lives of a great many students. But we have also learned much to inform future research and practice at the university. Three broad themes stand out.

Translating aspirations into reality
Most students in CPS aspire to a college degree but too few are able to translate their aspirations into reality. The reasons for this are complex and are not entirely within the control of schools and colleges. Yet we know that access to challenging courses, good advice and a general climate of support are critical factors in smoothing the path not only to college admission, but more importantly, to degree attainment. The CPS College Bridge program did all of these things, and from our perspective at DePaul, did them very well. In a sense, it was a quintessential college “match” strategy long before the language of match entered our vocabulary.

Making hard work pay off
In its 2009 report on CPS students taking academically advanced coursework, the Consortium on Chicago School Research showed that Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs were filling an important gap in the neighborhood schools. Perhaps the same should be said about the CPS College Bridge program.

College Bridge was hard work for the student participants, both academically and logistically. It was something they had to do on top of the regular demands of high school. Our experience at DePaul suggests that programs such as this can do much to strengthen student preparation for college. This is not just a question of providing access to challenging coursework, although that is critical; it is also a matter of finding ways to identify and reward students with the interest and determination to take full advantage of such opportunities.

The importance of partnerships
The CPS College Bridge program was always a multifaceted partnership between the CPS administration and area colleges, between school counselors and college staff, and to a lesser extent between the participating colleges themselves. Such partnerships are hard to sustain as institutional personnel, priorities and resources change. From an institutional perspective, so long as much of the funding came from elsewhere, it did not greatly matter if participants went on to enroll at other colleges. This was bound to change as colleges absorbed more of the costs of the program. Yet the partnership idea is an important one. While DePaul will build on its own programming for high school students, we will continue to work with CPS and other institutions to develop collaborative approaches to a collective challenge: how to improve postsecondary opportunity and achievement for students in Chicago.

From the very start, DePaul’s College Bridge program was excellent and outstanding. Glenna Ousley and her colleagues had a sense of urban mission and they didn’t doubt the potential of the program. You have to have a heart for the program. If you don’t believe in it, it won’t work. The difference at DePaul was the staff. They had heart. It wasn’t just talk.

Betty Cittadine
Former administrator
CPS College Bridge Program
Chicago Public Schools
SOURCES
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