



Pilsen and Gentrification: Service Learning Project Targets Neighborhood Change

By Dan Baron, Freelance Writer

Victoria Romero stands in front of her house on South Bishop Street in Chicago's Pilsen community, a largely Mexican-American, working class community that is located just a few miles from downtown.



A few doors south of her house stands a building that houses a fitness center and new condominiums — homes that are almost certainly too expensive for the vast majority of longtime residents of Pilsen. Across the street is a mural that proudly celebrates the Mexican and Mexican-American heritage of Romero and other longtime residents of Pilsen. What is happening on this street in Pilsen — and many other communities in Chicago and around the country — is the process of gentrification. For DePaul urban geography professors Euan Hague and Winifred Curran and a growing number of DePaul students, Pilsen has become the subject of continuing study and a service learning project for which students have studied firsthand the impact of gentrification on this neighborhood.

Exhibitions

Last June, Hague, Curran and students showcased their work at "Contested Chicago: Pilsen and Gentrification," an exhibition held by DePaul University and the neighborhood organization Pilsen Alliance at "Mess Hall," an experimental cultural center in the Rogers Park community on Chicago's north side. In September, "Contested Chicago" traveled to Toronto and was featured as part of the "CondoBoom!" exhibit. By November, Café Mestizo, in Pilsen, hosted the exhibit. Most recently, the Building Inventory Project and "Contested Chicago" won the Pilsen Alliance's Community Collaborators of the Year Award.

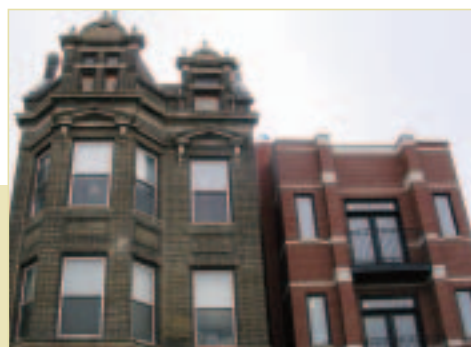
"This project is not about accepting how things are in a community — it is about understanding how development is impacting people who live there."

The idea behind the exhibition is to show how neighborhoods develop and how gentrification works — not only in a neighborhood or block, but from one building to the next. Walking through the exhibition, one could learn about the story of neighborhood development in a way that is unlikely to be told in textbooks alone. Maps of the Pilsen community, photos of buildings, posters from community meetings and a range of other key documents filled the exhibition, sharing a story of neighborhood change and preservation in Pilsen. What the project does — for students and community members — is capture specific changes in a neighborhood — and even a city block or property — in a way that enhances understanding and leads to discussion. Every student involved in the project, in fact, was assigned to a block in the community and studied the history of its properties, including when they were constructed, bought and sold. "Each student becomes an expert in one block," says Hague, whose work has emphasized cultural, political and urban geography. "They learn about the community and key issues like zoning, Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and property taxes and put what they learn in the context of the larger community." Students, Curran adds, have an opportunity to learn about a community in ways they might not have thought about before. "Why is it," she asks, "that one two-bedroom apartment costs \$1200 a month, while another two bedroom apartment on the same block costs only \$500? Studying the gentrification of this community has raised important questions for students about how neighborhood space, class and race are so inextricably bound in the American system.

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Left to Right: Andrea Craft, Hapreet Gill, Euan Hague, Alejandra Ibanez



1852 & 1850 South Allport



Mural, 18th Place & Paulina

Steans and the Puerto Rican Cultural Center: Partnership Embraces Service Learning

By Dan Baron, Freelance Writer

Division Street, Chicago.

Two gigantic, 50-ton steel sculptures of the Puerto Rican flag literally hang over a vibrant stretch of the city's Humboldt Park community between Western Avenue and California Avenue. Between these flags sits a dynamic community, a community called **Paseo Boricua** that has a rich history and culture all its own (Paseo means walkway; Boricua refers to someone of Puerto Rican descent).



Howard Rosing,

Executive Director of the Steans Center, teaches "Perspectives on Community Service," a DePaul class taught on-site at PRCC that explores social change in Humboldt Park. The class, Rosing and students in the class suggest, is different than most other classes in a number of ways – first, because it is held in the community, but also because students go out into the community and gain firsthand experience about how it works. "I try to think of what we are doing as a community immersion model for service learning," says Rosing. "We are taking a step out of the ivory tower and changing the physical environment of education." Understanding Humboldt Park, Rosing adds, means learning about the history of a people who have been oppressed in their original homeland, Puerto Rico, and later gentrified out of neighborhoods in Chicago, including Lincoln Park, Wicker Park and other communities.

In addition to the "Perspectives" class, DePaul students in recent years have had the chance to learn about this community through classes that include "Latino Immigration in Chicago," "Parenting in Multicultural Systems," "Motherhood in Latino Communities" and "Introduction to Public Service Management," as well as other courses.

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Partnership

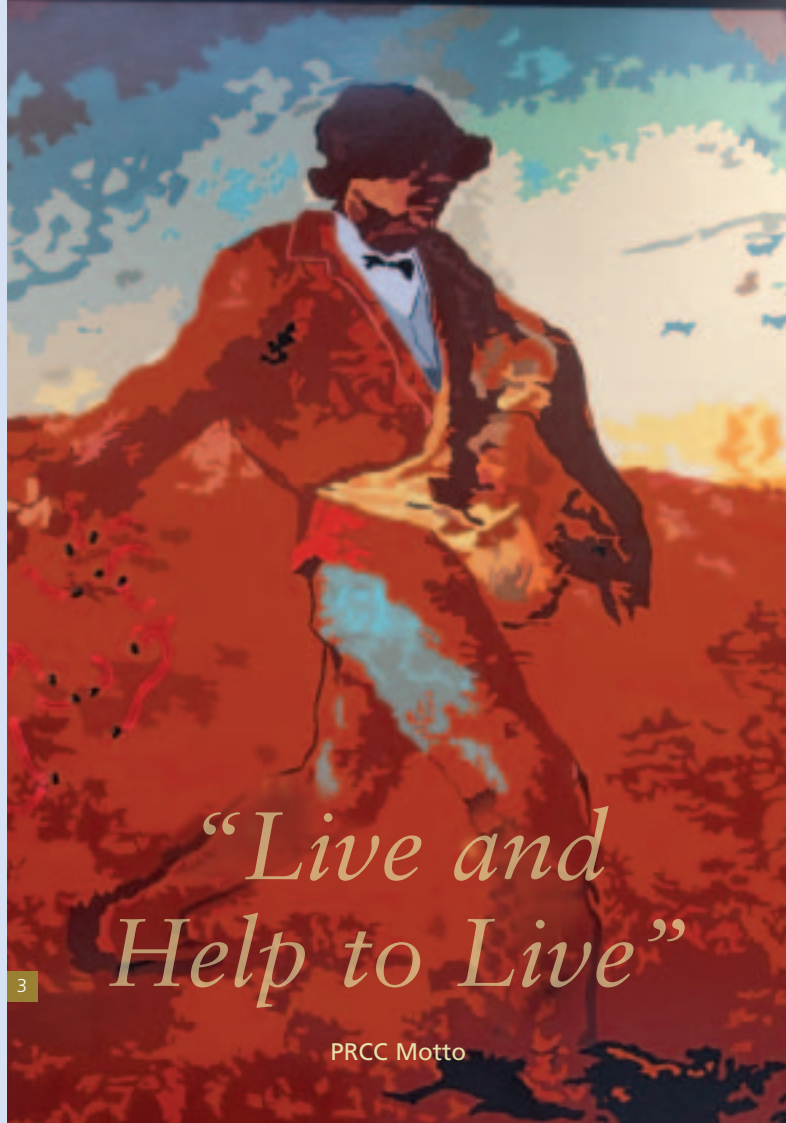
Jose Lopez, Executive Director of PRCC, says he is "personally delighted with the relationship that has developed over the years between Steans and PRCC. When you have students going to school in the age of information, places like the Steans Center become of the utmost importance because they encourage students to develop relationships and understand people." Lopez, who has been a teacher for more than three decades – at high schools and universities, including DePaul – says there must be a dialogue between all members of a community as well as those from the outside who visit the community like DePaul students.

For DePaul students who enter Humboldt Park, learning is not just about what they read about in textbooks or write about in a term paper. Students learn about this community through service learning opportunities in which they work closely with neighborhood organizations, residents and businesses, and a class that is held in the community itself. In recent years, the Steans Center has developed a strong connection to Humboldt Park and surrounding communities through a partnership with the Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC), a multi-faceted, non-profit community-based organization which serves the social and cultural needs of Chicago's Puerto Rican/Latino community. PRCC is an umbrella organization with many satellite groups working on a wide range of issues in the area, including education, child care, AIDS awareness and prevention, and obesity prevention. Last May, the Steans Center recognized PRCC for its collaboration and partnership with Steans during a ceremony for Vincentian Service Day.



As is true in Pilsen (see story on page 1) and many other Chicago communities, a major element of life in Humboldt Park is the continuing story of how residents and community groups preserve and develop the neighborhood, often in the face of gentrification that threatens to change the community.

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“Live and Help to Live”

PRCC Motto

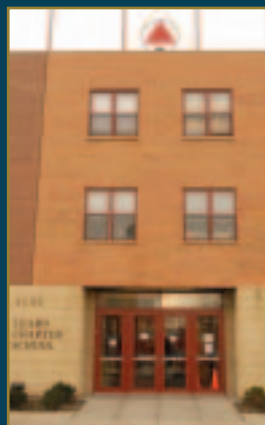
“Be a teacher and a learner, I tell people who come to this community. Understand people as human beings, not as some object of study.”

As he walks outside PRCC’s office on Division Street, Lopez also repeats a word some students might associate more with biological sciences than the study of communities: ecosystems. He explains that in an ecosystem, “everything is connected to everything else.

“To understand a community, you have to learn about its institutions, its restaurants, the little stores – everything that gives life to a community.” That includes the community’s intellectual life, says Lopez. In June, PRCC hosted “Community as Intellectual Space 2006: From Community Organizing to Community Building.” The symposium is an annual event focused on Paseo Boricua as a model of sustained social change, community development, cultural expression, and intellectual space.

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Ongoing Accomplishments: DePaul’s North Lawndale Initiative



On Tuesday, October 10th, six faculty members and 14 students from the Nursing Department organized a health fair at North Lawndale College Preparatory High School (NLCP) as part of DePaul University’s North Lawndale Initiative. Led by the Steans Center, this initiative connects DePaul with organizations and institutions in the North Lawndale community on the west side of Chicago to share resources and learning opportunities.

Nursing faculty Susan Poslusny, Kim Amer, Ron Graf, Young-Me Lee, Barbara Harris, and Marcia Stout organized their students to provide health screenings, physical exams, immunizations, and health information sessions on nutrition, sex education, and oral health to over 50 high school students.

All those involved benefited from the experience. NLCP students met the deadline for updating their health information at the school and received their physicals and immunizations at no cost, NLCP was able to provide this service to its students, and DePaul nursing students were able to practice what they were learning in a real world setting.

This was the second health fair organized by the Steans Center at a North Lawndale school. The first took place in July 2006 at KIPP/Ascend, a middle school that serves students in fifth through eighth grade. Over 20 KIPP students received physicals, immunizations, and health information. In a related event, KIPP students were recently hosted by the Black Student Union for a tour of DePaul. The intent of the tour was to provide the students with a sense of college life. Both KIPP and NLCP focus on preparing their students for success in college.



Another innovative project underway is the oral history documentation of LEARN school. After LEARN expressed a concern that the charter school’s unique 20-year history would be lost unless someone undertook the project, Anne Rapp, Assistant Director for Academic Development at the Steans Center and adjunct faculty member in the School for New Learning, agreed to create such a project as an assignment for one of her courses. Dr. Rapp and her students will be working with a leadership team comprising the school’s founders and current teachers to design and implement the project, which will produce: several displays at the school on its history; an archive of the school’s founding documents; and incorporation of the history of the school into the its curriculum.

For more information on the North Lawndale Initiative, please contact Chris Brown at rbrown27@depaul.edu.



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"Most students who take this class have not been on the losing end of this process – and are surprised by what they see," adds Curran, who studied the link between gentrification and industrial displacement in a Brooklyn neighborhood before coming to DePaul. "It's a great opportunity for teaching – and learning."

Thus far, more than 200 students have taken the service learning class on this subject and participated in this project, which has been taught a total of ten times by Hague and Curran. Through this effort, DePaul faculty and staff have also presented information on this subject at community meetings and workshops.

Partnership

The partnership between the Steans Center for Community-based Service Learning and Pilsen Alliance has been key to the development of this service learning class and project. Steans has developed a strong relationship with Pilsen Alliance over the years, as it has with a wide range of community-based organizations in Chicago. Alejandra Ibanez, Executive Director of Pilsen Alliance says research conducted for this project has made a difference to the Alliance and community members it serves. "Before we established this partnership with Steans, residents were sharing anecdotes about how their rent or property taxes was going up," Ibanez says. "What these classes have done is provide us with actual factual data and research that backed up what we were seeing." There were, of course, boundaries for students – and members of the community – to cross as they learned about each other. Ibanez says that at first, "a lot of Pilsen residents wondered who these students were. Are they speculators or city inspectors? Ultimately, it was great for people in our community to see college students out here helping the neighborhood and for the students to be engaged in community work. Students learned about the historical context and cultural history of this issue." Not only that, Ibanez says, they also "learn to see the neighborhood through the eyes of residents."

Students gain experience

DePaul students who have worked on the project say it has opened their eyes about this community – and the value of service learning. "I think the work we are doing is having an effect in the real world," says Andrea Craft, a senior who is majoring in geography. Craft studied the Pilsen neighborhood through an urban geography class last spring and helped install the exhibition in Rogers Park in June. "This has been a great experience, because learning about the community in this way is an opportunity I probably wouldn't have otherwise had." Harpreet Gill, who graduated from DePaul last year with a degree in geography and also took the urban geography class, says the experience "taught me about the planning process for a community. I also learned that the more you get involved in a community, the better it will be. This project is not about accepting how things are in a community – it is about understanding how development is impacting people who live there." Gill, who made all of the maps for the exhibition, worked as a student and research assistant on the project. Ibanez said she was "blown away by the quality and artistry" of the maps Gill helped create.

Meanwhile, Victoria Romero, who is a board member of Pilsen Alliance, says this service learning project is having specific benefits for the Pilsen community. As she walks down the street where she grew up and now owns a home, Romero points to the buildings Curran referred to. One of them is owned by a member of her family; another, by a developer. One difference, she says, is that the developer is charging twice as much for a two-bedroom apartment as her family member is. It is that kind of difference, Romero adds, that can help lead to rent increases and higher assessments. Romero says that the impact of gentrification on her community is profound. Pilsen Alliance, she said, is using data collected by students to inform residents about what this means — and the prospect of more development that could lead to further change in their community. "People who have lived in this neighborhood for years often don't want to have to leave." Romero says. "This project makes important information about our community user-friendly for people who live here."

Service Extension in Merida, Mexico

Collaboration between the Study Abroad Program and the Steans Center has fostered the creation of the Merida Service Extension program. Through this program students have the opportunity to extend their Winter Quarter experience in Merida through the end of Spring Quarter by participating in a community internship with a Mexican community-based organization. This program has been strengthened by a collaboration with the Marista University in Merida that is also engaged in service learning or "aprender sirviendo." DePaul students are enrolled in CSS 395: Community Internship and earn a \$1,500 stipend. The Service Extension seeks to foster a deeper understanding about social justice issues in a global context.

Annual Idealist Campus Conference at DePaul This March

The staff of the Steans Center and the national organization Action Without Borders/Idealist on Campus have been busy planning the 2007 Idealist Campus Conference (formerly known as the COOL Idealist National Conference). This annual gathering of college students and staff around themes of service, justice, and activism is the largest of its kind in the nation. And, from March 23-25, 2007, DePaul University has the honor of hosting it in Chicago for the first time in the event's twenty-four year history.

Ashley Cureton, a junior Community Service Studies minor and former M3C Fellow through the Center, has been hired as the Student Planning Committee Director. She works directly with Idealist on Campus to plan conference logistics from dining to housing to programming. She has most recently recruited a team of Project Area Coordinators: **Job Acosta, Noel Hammond, Jade Petermon, and Patti Vocal.** Together, they are working to assemble the Student Planning Committee, composed of undergraduates from both DePaul and other area institutions, who will essentially plan and carry out the rest of the conference logistics.

The Idealist Campus Conference will be mainly located at the Loop Campus of DePaul for the Spring Break weekend of 2007. Opening programming, however, will take place Friday night at Chicago's famed Navy Pier. Closing ceremonies on Sunday will be hosted at the Theater School at DePaul's Merle Reskin Theater in the South Loop. Housing options will be available through Loop hotels and hostels and minimal-cost space for sleeping bags is offered at the Ray Meyer Fitness Center at Lincoln Park Campus.

Registration for the conference is now open and more information is available at:
<http://www.idealists.org/conference 2007>.

<http://cbsl.depaul.edu>

Letter from the Executive Director



It is an honor to take on the role of Executive Director at the Steans Center and to continue the vision of our work established by my predecessor, Dr. Laurie Worrall. During the past eight years, the Center has grown rapidly, adding new faculty and courses each quarter and furthering our efforts to enhance student learning while supporting the critical work of numerous community partners. When I arrived at the Center in 2001, the generous endowment by the Steans

family positioned us to build a nationally recognized program that contributes to redefining how higher education institutions engage in addressing the many social, political, and economic challenges of our time.

I bring to my new position a continued strong commitment to promoting social justice, engaging community partners in a reciprocal manner, and expanding and enhancing academic-based service learning opportunities across the curriculum. During the past six months, the Center has embarked upon a planning process that directly aligns our goals and objectives with DePaul University's Vision Twenty12 strategic plan. During the coming years, we will be developing new interdepartmental collaborations in order to enrich the academic quality of the courses we support and to ensure that our partners in the community receive the best service from DePaul students. We will also be further institutionalizing our support of community-based research, developing new departmental concentrations in the Community Service Studies minor, expanding our Catholic Schools Initiative and Jumpstart programs, and deepening our efforts to create a university-wide partnership with the North Lawndale community. All of these efforts will provide students and faculty with opportunities to extend classroom learning into the city and to raise important practical, ethical, and moral questions about how to address systemic problems in areas such as affordable housing, healthcare, education, and neighborhood development.

My primary challenge will be to ensure, through detailed assessment, that the work we are supporting is truly having an impact on DePaul students and the communities they serve. I will also continue to encourage, and collaborate with, faculty to produce scholarship in the areas of service learning, community-based research, and university-community partnerships. I expect these efforts to result in new ways of highlighting DePaul's unique model of engaged learning and student leadership development.

I think you will find that this issue of our newsletter sheds light on some extraordinary examples of how the Steans Center provides a resource for faculty, students, and community organizations. I look forward to hearing your feedback (hrosing@depaul.edu) and to strategizing new ways of connecting the learning objectives of DePaul courses to vital community work taking place in Chicago and internationally.

Howard Rosing
Executive Director

Irwin W. Steans Center

Mission Statement

The Steans Center for Community-based Service Learning provides educational opportunities grounded in Vincentian community values to DePaul students. The Center seeks to develop mutually beneficial, reciprocal relationships with community organizations in order to develop a sense of social agency in our students through enrollment in CbSL courses, community internships and placements, and community-based student employment.



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Steans and the Puerto Rican Cultural Center: Partnership Embraces Service Learning

Students as service learners

Among the organizations that “give life” to this community are a myriad of community-based groups that are part of PRCC and have partnered with Steans to create service learning opportunities. In the last year, DePaul students engaged in service learning opportunities with Pedro Albizu Campos High



School, the Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce in Illinois, the Lolita Lebron Family Learning Center, and Vida/SIDA, which strives to educate the community about HIV and AIDS. “This community is highly organized, especially on issues related to

gentrification,” says Marisol Morales, Associate Director for the Steans Center. Morales, who was formerly the Program Director of the Family Learning Center, says that Steans courses and service learning opportunities “provide a different perspective for students than what they may be used to. Our emphasis is on what assets the community has.” “It’s such an amazing community, and many people know so little about it,” adds Andrea Garces, a DePaul alumna who worked as the Humboldt Park Community Coordinator for the Steans Center. “Hopefully, we are doing something to help turn that around and open the eyes of students to a new culture.”



Many students who have been involved in the service learning experience say it has done just that. “I was in charge of going to some of the businesses in the area and asking customers questions in the form of a survey,” says Adrianna Becerra, who is now

a senior at DePaul. Becerra says she plans to go back to Humboldt Park and work with the organization as a volunteer. She also plans to take a salsa dancing class in the neighborhood. Brady Hodgson, who is now a senior in political science, called the experience of taking a class and engaging in community service in Humboldt Park “eye-opening.” Hodgson, who interviewed business owners for the business association, was impressed with what he learned about community in the “Perspectives” class – and in his interactions with community members. “I had a chance to learn why people are in the conditions they are in – and how there are barriers preventing them from being higher up in the economic chain. At the same time, I found this to be a very friendly and closeknit community.”

Meanwhile, Ryan Kehoe, a junior in communication, worked with a group organizing to prevent obesity, informing community members about the issue. “I had never really thought about community service on this level,” she says. “It’s so important to know that working in a community, I can make a difference. Taking a class in Humboldt Park and doing community service showed me that we can go way beyond stereotypes about communities if we keep an open mind.”



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