

Customer-centered education



As a UIC psychology major, Olga Reyes had a very specific idea of her career path. “I had romantic notions of becoming a psychologist and hanging a shingle, getting a leather couch and charging people megabucks per hour,” says Reyes, now a UIC associate professor of psychology. That plan eventually faded. What remained was a sincere interest in human behavior, listening to people’s stories and trying to help them. Graduate school increased her interest in research and teaching.

“I became more excited about the potential of research to have much more of a wide-reaching impact,” says Reyes, who studies high-risk behaviors among urban minorities, particularly urban Latino youth at risk for dropping out of school.

Considered one of the most demanding teachers in the psychology department, Reyes hasn’t lost her perspective from the other side of the lectern. As an undergraduate she was reluctant to say, “I have no idea what you are talking about.” “I try to make it easy for students to say that,” she says. “At the same time, I hold them to standards that a lot of them don’t like.”

Reyes offers her students support in and out of the classroom and extra-credit opportunities that always include writing assignments and essay exams. “One of the greatest skills you can possibly walk away with is knowing how to write and knowing how to communicate your ideas on paper,” she says.

Reyes believes it’s important for students to offer feedback and act like consumers. “Their course with me is a purchase that they and their parents are making. They are entitled to be satisfied with the purchase for whatever use they want.”

Reporting by Brian Flood, UIC News Bureau



CHICAGO

Low-wage jobs cost Illinois taxpayers

Low-wage jobs cost Illinois taxpayers more than \$2 billion a year for programs that help working families meet basic household expenses. The study by Nik Theodore, director of the UIC Center for Urban Economic Development, documents the public cost of low-wage jobs held by year-round Illinois workers. Some employers, even in large, profitable sectors, take advantage of the earned income tax credit, food stamps, Medicaid and child-care subsidies. Assistance to working families makes up 37 percent of all Illinois public benefits spending. Theodore says the public needs to understand the hidden costs of low-wage work when evaluating economic development efforts.

URBANA

Preparing for the next Katrina

Updating and clarifying the rights and responsibilities of civilian workers in times of national emergencies would improve homeland security, says an Urbana faculty member. Research by Michael LeRoy, professor of law and labor and industrial relations, reveals that officials have limited power to require workers to perform critical jobs during events such as a terrorist attack or destructive acts of nature like Hurricane Katrina. LeRoy recommends Congress clarify legal questions involving civilians, including emergency doctors, nurses, police and others, working under conditions that expose them to life-threatening hazards.



CHICAGO

Racial diversity= successful businesses

Racial diversity in a company’s workforce leads to improved business performance and volume, according to Cedric Herring, UIC professor of sociology. Herring analyzed data from a national sample of firms and found that diversity produces tangible benefits for businesses, including higher sales revenues, more customers and larger market share compared to firms with a more homogeneous makeup. The results, presented at the 2006 meeting of the American Sociological Association, showed that racial diversity improved performance even after controlling for such factors as companies’ legal form of organization, gender composition, size, age, type of work and region.

CHICAGO

Marketing the Navy

Students in an upper-level marketing course at UIC started a working advertising agency to create, implement and evaluate a recruiting campaign for the U.S. Navy. The students designed an interactive campaign to increase awareness of career opportunities with the Navy as well as encouraging enlistments. The undergraduates applied skills learned in other classes to the project and honed their presentation, teamwork and communications skills. UIC was one of seven universities participating in the experiential program sponsored by the Navy.

