

[Back to News](#)



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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **U of I Salutes High-Achieving Minority High School Students**

CHICAGO—More than 1,300 top African-American, Latino and Native American students from 304 Illinois high schools will be honored at the University of Illinois' 20 th annual Salute to Academic Achievement Thursday, Dec. 4, at the Chicago Hilton and Towers.

Erika Harold, who was Miss America 2003 and a 2001 graduate of the Urbana-Champaign campus, will be the featured speaker. University President James J. Stukel also will address the students at a luncheon, set for 11:30 a.m. Salute to Academic Achievement, for high school students, their families and school counselors, will be from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the Grand Ballroom of the Hilton, 720 S. Michigan Ave.

The students are being recognized by the University of Illinois President's Award Program, which targets academically outstanding young people from groups underrepresented in college. For the fall 2003 semester, now drawing to a close, nearly 2,500 President's Award Program students are enrolled at the U of I's three campuses, including 704 freshmen.

Many of the 1,346 students invited to the luncheon will be offered admission to one of the three University of Illinois campuses: at Chicago (UIC), at Springfield (UIS) or at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) as President's Award Program scholars.

The University started the PAP to respond to the intense—and successful—recruitment of Illinois ' best minority high school graduates to top colleges and universities in other states. The goal is to keep Illinois talent in Illinois . Since 1985, the program has helped more than 9,930 students with excellent high school records and high scores on standardized achievement tests to enroll at the University of Illinois .

“The President's Award Program recognizes the achievements of these bright young students while they are still in high school,” said Stukel. “We let them know that their hard work has not gone unnoticed, and that we believe they have what it takes to go to college.”

Stukel said many of the students honored Dec. 4 will be recruited by colleges and universities around the country, but that the University believes it is critical to the state's future that as many as possible remain in Illinois. Experience shows that many students migrate permanently to the states where they attend college.

“Our state will need their skills and leadership in the future, as the workforce becomes increasingly

diverse and the economy increasingly competitive,” Stukel said. “Of course, we hope they choose to attend the University of Illinois—but we congratulate them and wish them well, regardless.”

Harold, Miss America for 2003, grew up in Urbana and is a 2001 Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where she was a President's Award Program student, as well as a Chancellor's Scholar. Harold has been accepted to the Harvard Law School ; her Miss America scholarships are worth more than \$80,000.

Two President's Award Program scholars also will speak at the luncheon. They are Sylvia Caballero, a senior English major at Urbana-Champaign, will be the principal student speaker and Andre Gonzalez, a senior who is in the Guaranteed Professional Programs Admissions in Medicine at UIC, will deliver greetings to the students and their families.

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***Editors/Reporters and News Directors: Students and University of Illinois officials will be available for interviews at the event. Interviews with Spanish-speaking students and administrators can be arranged. Call Jim Cogley or Tom Hardy at 312-996-3772.***