



WHEATON

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WEST OF THE WINDY CITY.

THE STORY OF WHEATON COLLEGE'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE CITY OF CHICAGO

WHEATON COLLEGE HAS always had its face turned east toward the City by the Lake. Its posture toward the city, though, has changed over the 160 years since its founding; there have been times of reaching and times of drawing near; times of kneeling and times of leaning in; times of shouting and times of listening; times of teaching and times of learning; times of giving mercy and times of receiving mercy. Yet through all the years, Wheaton has never turned away from Chicago.

Throughout the College's long history of engagement with Chicago, its relationship with the city has developed with new emphases for new eras. Early in Wheaton College's history, Chicago was seen as the gateway to global missions, and in the early twentieth century, students engaged with the city primarily through personal evangelism. The focus changed mid-century to more direct service and care for the people of the city. Later, and in recent memory, Wheaton students have engaged with the city through urban studies. All of these emphases are still present today, and the College has a renewed sense of presence in the Windy City.



Special Collections, Buswell Library, College Archives, RG 3.4.4.2 (OCO) Box 3, 'Photos'

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PROXIMITY

WHEATON: THE GATEWAY TO THE GATE CITY

● 1859 TO THE EARLY 1900s



Wheaton Station, *Street Railway Journal*, Volume 20, No. 1, July 5, 1884, p. 573

LOOKING EAST FROM THE TOWER of Blanchard Hall, across the prairies and swamps and small towns, following the rail line, Wheaton College's first president, Jonathan Blanchard, could nearly see Chicago. It was only a short train ride from Wheaton into this gate city to the world.

In 1859, as the newly forming college was

seeking its footing, the trustees drafted a statement to be published in *The Congregational Herald* that celebrated its proximity to—and distance from—the swiftly growing metropolis of Chicago. “This college,” it stated, “is located within an hour’s ride of Chicago, upon a double track, over which some six or seven railroads pass into the city.... The site of the college is healthy and delightful, and families in the city who wish to have their children away from its noise and temptations, and yet within an hour of home, will find in Wheaton instruction for both sexes in the various branches of academic and collegiate education.”²¹ Similar words would appear in the early catalogs of the College.

THE MISSION OF WHEATON COLLEGE WOULD BE FUNNELED THROUGH CHICAGO AND INTO THE WORLD—A MISSION OF EDUCATION, BUT ALSO A MISSION OF CARRYING THE GOSPEL AND TESTIMONIES AGAINST THE SOCIAL ILLS OF SLAVERY, INTEMPERANCE, AND SECRET SOCIETIES.

Late in life, Jonathan Blanchard said that one of the reasons he had accepted the offer to lead Wheaton College was “because Wheaton [was] near Chicago, the Gate City between the Atlantic and Pacific, between Western Europe and Eastern Asia.”² He said he “believed that the Lord had need of a college near Chicago, to open the eyes of the American people; to enthrone Christ whom the lodge dethrones; and to teach the nations of the earth.”³

The mission of Wheaton College would be funneled through Chicago and into the world—a mission of education, but also a mission of carrying the gospel and testimonies against the social ills of slavery, intemperance, and secret societies. The institution would have an audience with the American people and the nations of the earth—the College would provide what Blanchard knew the city needed.

In these early years, there were hints of the kinds of engagement that were to come. On October 8, 1871, a fire began on DeKoven Street that would go on to burn for two more days. The Great Chicago Fire left 300 Chicagoans dead and 90,000 homeless, and destroyed over 17,000 buildings. In Wheaton, students could see the enormous red glow in the sky to the east. A student wrote in his journal the next day, “Monday, October 9, Fire raging in Chicago all day... the people of Chicago call for food

and clothing.”⁴ Jonathan Blanchard, responding to that call, worked with a group of students and faculty to gather needed supplies from surrounding residents, and drove wagon-loads of provisions into the city for several days.

Eleven years later, when Charles Blanchard succeeded his father as president of Wheaton, he continued in this posture with the city. Though The World’s Columbian Exposition (World’s Fair) officially opened in Chicago on May 1, 1893, news of the Exposition was covered for several years leading up to the opening. In October of 1891, “two hundred and twenty-two ‘genial, tolerant fellows’ gathered around the well-loaded tables of the Sunset Club in the Grand Pacific Hotel,” the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported. This was “the largest number ever assembled in the history of the organization.” Over plates of cream of celery and cutlets of trout, the group discussed a contentious issue: should the World’s Fair be open on Sundays? Among those present was Charles Blanchard—he stood in opposition to the Fair being opened on the Lord’s Day.⁵ A full year later, the American Secular Union and Freethought Federation—which was fiercely dedicated to the separation of church and state—invited Freethought lecturer Benjamin Franklin Underwood of Boston, Massachusetts, to debate Blanchard on the topic. According to an October 1892 article in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Mr. Underwood argued that those who worked six days per week should have the opportunity to attend the Fair on Sundays. President Blanchard argued that the Fair ought not to be open on Sundays because “it would not pay, because it would be un-American, because it would violate the law of the State, because it would violate the law of God.” According to Blanchard, “outside of our large cities,” Americans were Sabbath-keepers. Inside the cities—well, inside the cities the Sabbath was broken. Blanchard’s concern? “Murder, suicide, illegitimacy, and industrial slavery are the lot of people who do not observe the Sabbath.”⁶

1860

Wheaton College is founded

“This college is located within an hour’s ride of Chicago, upon a double track, over which some six or seven railroads pass into the city.... The site of the college is healthy and delightful, and families in the city who wish to have their children away from its noise and temptations, and yet within an hour of home, will find in Wheaton instruction for both sexes in the various branches of academic and collegiate education.”

— Board of Trustees Letter to the *Congregational Herald*, 1859

1865

The Union Stock Yard & Transit Co. (Chicago’s meatpacking district) is founded

“Why did I come to Wheaton? And why make opposition to secret societies so prominent? I answer: 1. Because Wheaton is near Chicago, the Gate City between the Atlantic and Pacific, between Western Europe and Eastern Asia. 2. Because the Wesleyans had given up their Institute, on condition that their testimony against the lodge should be maintained. 3. But the chief reason was, I believed the Lord had need of Wheaton College, to aid in preparing the way for his coming. The state of our nation at the time will explain this.

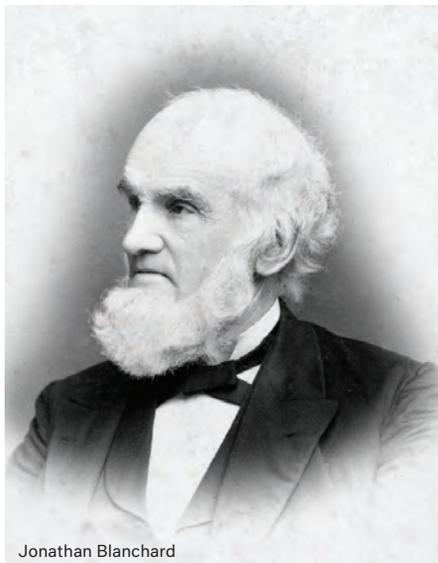
“I believed that the Lord had need of a college near Chicago, to open the eyes of the American people; to enthrone Christ, whom the lodge dethrones; and to teach the nations of the earth, who worship devils, that there is no reaching the Infinite God without a Mediator. Congregationalists, who are Anti-masons by their history and their creed, had no college near Chicago.”
— Jonathan Blanchard, “My Life Work,” in *Sermons and Addresses* (1892)

The city, in Charles Blanchard’s view, needed to come under God’s order. Later, a few weeks *after* the Fair opened, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that Blanchard continued to hold “the standard of opposition,” and that he said “the question had narrowed down to Sabbath or nothing, and the church would have no power if it refused to make a stand.”⁷ While the rest of the world might attend the Fair on Sunday, the people of God should not.

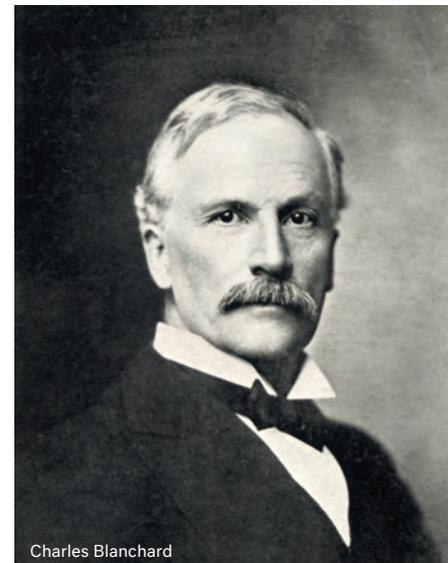
Like Jonathan Blanchard before him, Charles argued publicly for various kinds of reforms, including ones against the influence of fraternal organizations, such as Freemasonry, systems of child labor, the degradation of women, the drinking of alcohol, and exempting Catholic priests from civil law. As he wrote in articles for Wheaton’s student newspaper *The Record*, it was the duty of colleges, especially Christian ones, to be leaders in efforts of reform.⁸

In 1883 and 1884, Charles served as interim pastor of what was then known as the Chicago Avenue Church (now The Moody Church).⁹ His duties required him to lead weekly prayer meetings on Friday evenings and remain over the Sabbath before returning to campus on Monday to teach classes. He left the position in order to care for his four daughters after the death of his second wife, though his relationship with the church continued for the rest of his life. On November 8, 1925, Charles preached the first sermon in the newly built Moody Church to an audience of over 4,000. Coincidentally, it was just two days earlier that he had preached the first sermon in Pierce Chapel on Wheaton’s campus, which had just been built as well.¹⁰

Charles was also instrumental in the founding of Moody Bible Institute. When his dear friend Emma Dryer was seeking support for a new institution to train evangelists, Charles helped secure a needed \$500 for the purpose.¹¹ He continued to lend



Jonathan Blanchard



Charles Blanchard



Southeast view of Moody Memorial Church, architect Fugard and Knapp, at 1635 North LaSalle Street, Chicago, Illinois, 1920s or 1930s. (Photo by Raymond W Trowbridge/Chicago History Museum/Getty Images)

1871

Great Chicago Fire

Jonathan Blanchard and students bring aid to victims of the fire

“Monday, October 9, Fire raging in Chicago all day... the people of Chicago call for food and clothing.” — Wheaton College student diary

1883-84

Charles Blanchard serves as interim pastor of what was known as the Chicago Avenue Church, now known as The Moody Church

1886

Haymarket Riot

1889

Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr founds Hull House

1890

University of Chicago is founded

1891-93

Charles Blanchard serves as senior pastor of Chicago Avenue Church

Provident Hospital is founded, where Wheaton students would minister in coming years



support to the growing institution as he was able. Like his father, Charles felt that Chicago had special significance. In his 1890 book *Educational Papers*, he described the city in glowing terms: Chicago was “the heart of the great Interior, the center of trade, religious influences and political power for the valley of the Mississippi, the home of the most powerful people on the globe.” And

Wheaton’s nearness to it allowed for students “to be prepared to do service for the world.”¹² Jonathan and Charles, among many other public intellectuals and Christian leaders of the day, assumed that the city was full of problems to solve. Urbanization was untying the strings that held society together, and Wheaton students needed to be prepared for this fast-urbanizing world. The city was a place of power and influence, a place from which the gospel could go forth, as well as a place in need of the gospel.

1892 The Chicago and South Side Rapid Transit Railroad, Chicago’s first “L” line, begins operation

1893 The World’s Columbian Exposition (World’s Fair); World’s Parliament of Religions opens

Charles Blanchard opposes the Fair being open on Sundays

YMCA is founded for spiritual growth and to connect with other Christian college students in the Chicago area

1894 Pullman Strike

1895 YWCA is founded for spiritual growth and to connect with other Christian college students in the Chicago area

1897 The Union Loop Elevated is completed

EVANGELISM

CARRYING THE TESTIMONY TO CHICAGO'S CHILDREN,
SICK, PRISONERS, AND DESTITUTE

● EARLY 1900s TO THE MID-1900s



Tower, 1954

ON A WARM SUNDAY AFTER-noon during the fall of 1921, a group of male Wheaton College students ventured into the city, arriving somewhere around Madison and Jefferson, two blocks west of Northwestern Depot. The 1922 yearbook, the *Tower*, records the event:

*The streets were crowded with men and women, some of whom were seeking pleasure, but the majority were doing nothing but walking the streets. For most of the fellows present that day it was a new experience, but they had a story to tell and by His strength were there to tell it. They stepped out into the street, took off their hats and prayed that God would give them the message, fill them with His Spirit and send those there whom He desired to hear the Gospel. On looking up they met the direct answer to their prayer for facing them there lined the curb a crowd of curious people, wondering no doubt, why such a group of young fellows should be found praying on the street corner. The crowd grew as the meeting went on. The Gospel was presented thru [sic] testimony and song, and God gave the fellows souls for their hire. Could any business be more profitable?*¹³

For many students at the turn of the century, evangelism was at the core of what it meant to be a Christian, and Chicago—this center of political and religious influences—was a place of particular importance. Thus, the first half of the twentieth century found students directing many of their activities toward sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with Chicago residents.

In 1893, students established a campus chapter of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), followed two years later by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). The focus of both organizations was to help students grow in their faith, but a secondary purpose was to connect them with Christians at other colleges in the area. Sponsored activities included noon-day prayer meetings, Bible studies, and social gatherings, as well as regional gatherings.¹⁴ As the years went along, service to surrounding communities and the city became more prominent too.

In the 1924 edition of the *Tower*, the YWCA page explained that other campus organizations had been started to support religious activities, so they had decided to focus on service.¹⁵ That year, they created scrapbooks for children in Chicago hospitals and filled 50 boxes with candy, toys, and fruit for the children of the Municipal Tuberculosis Sanitarium in the city. A few years later, they reported visiting patients on a weekly basis at Provident Hospital—the first African-American-founded and -operated hospital in America—to share their testimonies.¹⁶ (Until the mid-twentieth century, most Chicago hospitals refused to treat African Americans or employ black healthcare workers. Provident Hospital was established in Chicago in 1891 by Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, a surgeon.)

In 1919¹⁷, the YMCA organized “Gospel Teams,” a student-led ministry that would last until the 1960s. Initially, a Gospel Team was composed of



National Guardsmen, called in by Mayor 'Big Bill' Thompson, question a man in Chicago, 1919. (Photo by Jun Fujita/Chicago History Museum/Getty Images)

four men who would travel to different locations to hold a public evangelistic service. They would play instruments, sing, and share their testimonies. The gatherings would always end with an invitation for hearers to enter into a saving relationship with Jesus. The services would be held in jails, on street corners, and in railroad stations, and increasingly, churches in Chicago began inviting the teams to come as well. The story mentioned previously—from the *Tower* of 1922 of students preaching a couple of blocks from Northwestern Depot—was a Gospel Team group.¹⁸

The ministry of Gospel Teams grew and became an independent organization in 1929.¹⁹ The teams were encouraged to be innovative in their approach

1919

Chicago Race Riots

The Christian Union forms to facilitate cooperation between Christian service organizations on campus

The Gospel Team program is founded

1921

Gospel Teams in the city—*“The streets were crowded with men and women, some of whom were seeking pleasure, but the majority were doing nothing but walking the streets. For most of the fellows present that day it was a new experience, but they had a story to tell and by His strength were there to tell it. They stepped out into the street, took off their hats and prayed that God would give them the message, fill them with His Spirit and send those there whom He desired to hear the Gospel. On looking up they met the direct answer to their prayer for facing them there lined the curb a crowd of curious people, wondering no doubt, why such a group of young fellows should be found praying on the street corner. The crowd grew as the meeting went on. The Gospel was presented thru [sic] testimony and song, and God gave the fellows souls for their hire. Could any business be more profitable?”* — *Tower*, 1922

1929

Wheaton College YMCA votes unanimously to withdraw from the national organization due to its perceived modernist shift

St. Valentine's Day Massacre

“...A BUSLOAD OF STUDENTS WOULD LEAVE PIERCE CHAPEL TO GO TO THE NEAREST ‘L’ STATION, BOARD THE TRAINS FOR THE TRIP AROUND THE LOOP, AND EVANGELIZE DURING THE ROUTE.”

to spreading the good news, and they eventually expanded to include women and such “controversial” instruments as the saxophone. They also ventured outside of Chicagoland, doing summer tours in other areas of the United States, and a few ventured globally.²⁰

Another innovative approach to sharing the gospel targeted fellow college students. In the fall of 1930, Wheaton senior Carl Anderson ’31 founded the Scripture Distribution Society (SDS). The SDS printed copies of the Gospel of John to be given out at University of Chicago and Northwestern University football games. The booklets featured a quote on the cover from famous University of Chicago football coach Amos Alonzo Stagg: “This little book will help us all to win—in the Game of Life.”²¹ The SDS gave out the booklets to football fans as they entered and exited the stadiums. Within an eight-week period, they distributed more than 108,000 copies. Expanding their activities beyond Chicago, the students soon began sending the pamphlets through the mail to students at institutions like the University of Illinois and Yale University.²² They also created more booklets, often highlighting individual testimonies. One booklet told the stories of successful businessmen and included the testimony of a manager from Marshall Field’s, the famous Chicago department store.²³

sonal work” was a type of evangelism that was done one-on-one or in small groups. Students would go to places like Chicago rescue missions, jails, and hospitals to share the gospel and to pray with people. They would often take booklets from the SDS with them to share. As one student remarked, “good evangelism required literature.”²⁵

In 1943, under the leadership of Christian Council student president Billy Graham ’43, the organization expanded its activities. It began a new initiative of sending personal work teams to Chicago’s “L” trains for onboard witnessing. On Sunday afternoons, a busload of students would leave Pierce Chapel to go to the nearest “L” station, board the trains for the trip around the Loop, and evangelize during the route. Personal work teams also visited Cook County Hospital, and in order to reach men in the armed services, they witnessed in Chicago Servicemen’s centers and railroad stations as well.²⁶ To oversee all these activities and more, Christian Council welcomed its first executive director, Marjorie Glover ’31, in 1944.²⁷

Later that decade, student Scott Vining ’48 organized an outreach to West Madison Street’s “Skid Row.”²⁸ While evangelism was at the heart of the ministry, the students would sometimes help connect the people they encountered with needed services or individuals who could help them. And in 1949, students began doing evangelistic work among Chicago’s Spanish-speaking populations.²⁹

In 1948, the *Tower* reported that one out of every four Wheaton students was busy in Christian work every week.³⁰ And in 1950, more than 500 students qualified to serve with the Christian Service Council, and 1,100 Gospel Team assignments were fulfilled.³¹

In 1949, students Floyd Potts ’49 and Frank Breisch ’49 started what was then known as “Colored Sunday School” for African-American children on Chicago’s South Side.³² Wheaton students would travel into the city, pick up the children from their homes or churches, and then take them to a different

During the 1938-39 school year, the newly formed Christian Council (which would eventually become the Christian Service Council) began coordinating all student service activities,²⁴ including the SDS and Gospel Teams, as well as what was known as “personal work” teams. “Personal work” was a type of evangelism that was done one-on-one or in small groups. Students would go to places like Chicago rescue missions, jails, and hospitals to share the gospel and to pray with people. They would often take booklets from the SDS with them to share. As one student remarked, “good evangelism required literature.”²⁵

1930

The League of Evangelical Students is organized

Merchandise Mart opens

Wheaton senior Carl Anderson ’31 founds the Scripture Distribution Society (SDS)

1934

The YWCA dissolves into the League of Evangelical Students

1935

Missionary Volunteers, the SDS and the Ministerial Association come under the umbrella of The League of Evangelical Students

1937

Christian Council is organized

Chicago Housing Authority is founded

1941

The Frances Cabrini and William Green Homes project begins



Tower, 1949

location to hold a Sunday school. They would share prepared Bible lessons, sing songs with the children, and do activities such as performing Nativity plays. This ministry quickly became popular among Wheaton students, with 300 participating in 13 separate Sunday schools by 1951.³³

The proliferation of student-led evangelistic organizations during the first half of the

twentieth century is a testimony of Wheaton students' deep sense of Chicago's need for the good news of Jesus Christ. Thousands of students in this era ministered the gospel to probably millions of people in Chicago. And with regular day trips into Chicago, Wheaton College students were exposed to other needs in the city as well.

1943

Billy Graham is president of the Christian Council; the year's emphasis is on "personal evangelism," including Sunday witnessing on "L" trains and visits to Cook County Hospital, Chicago Servicemen's centers

1944

Miss Marjorie Glover '31 becomes executive director of the Christian Council

1949

Wheaton students found popular Sunday school for children on the South and West Sides of Chicago

1953

Earliest-found mention of "Christian Service Council" (CSC) rather than Christian Council (exactly when the name change took place is uncertain)

1955

First section of Congress (Dwight D. Eisenhower) Expressway opens

SERVICE

CARING FOR CHICAGO'S PEOPLE

● MID-1900s TO LATE 1900s



Chicago State Street in 1953. (Photo by H. Armstrong Roberts/ClassicStock/Getty Images)

A

AFTER THE 1950s, WHEATON College students began seriously connecting with the social issues of the city, adopting a different posture than in the past.

In a March 1964 article in the African-American-operated *Chicago Daily Defender*, Chuck Stone—famed Tuskegee Airman and journalist—commented on an encouraging encounter with

Wheaton College students. While some people criticized the youth of the day, Stone was optimistic. “Two experiences last week reaffirmed my faith in today’s kids. In fact, I’ve never been more optimistic about the future of American civilization.” One of those experiences was speaking to the Christian Service Council (CSC) of Wheaton College. Stone, looking on the audience of 200 students in attendance, said that they “reflected the conceptualization many have of America: white, Protestant, middle-class, freshly scrubbed, blonde-blue-eyed, eagerness bursting forth at the intellectual [sic] seams.” They were curious about the “Negro church” and the “Black Muslim” movement, and the role of a Christian in a time of racial change and violence. They

wanted to know, “What more can we do than what we are doing now?” Stone was encouraged by the Wheaton students’ sincerity, earnestness, and compassion—and their commitment to Christian principles. They were, he said, “seeking independent answers within the Christian gospel.”³⁴

The Record also reported on Stone’s visit, noting that when he was asked about the ICCA [Inner City Christian Action] Sunday School and Teen Clubs, Stone was not familiar with them and said that Negroes probably viewed them as a “big joke.” He apparently went on to inform the group that they “must truly understand sympathetically the culture before gaining any recognition.”³⁵

In another article in *The Record* that year, Lynn Gray ’64 reflected on the word “inner-city.” He said, “Maybe it’s time we looked at situations which are ugly”—including “rat infested tenements,” little access to good education, job discrimination, etc.—“and realized that the ugliness is an extrapolation of our heritage, of our actions and therefore, we are responsible.”³⁶

Gray’s sentiments were foreshadowed a year earlier in a September 12, 1963, op-ed in *The Record*. In it, Roger Winter ’64—who went on to a career with the U.S. Department of State and was a key negotiator of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement for Sudan in 2005—called his classmates to service in Chicago’s South Side. “To one who has had too much religion preached at him and religion which only disappoints time after time, a tract is a joke and a Bible is an excuse to sneer. There is only one thing that can meet the needs of 900,000 Negroes in Chicago. It is not charity, promises or hopes of heaven.” What was it if not these? He continued: “It is a person who cares for them, each as an individual friend. It is a person who is willing to learn of past heartaches, frustrations and forgotten hopes; one who is an ally in the new hopes. It is

a person who will respect each of them as the highest creation of God. Only when they see and know a ‘little Christ’ will they listen to the claims of the Lord Christ. The latter cannot effectively precede the other.”

Winter’s op-ed closed with a call to his classmates: “There are numerous opportunities to serve on the great South Side. There is no need for the cock-sure, the know-it-all, or the elite. Chicago’s South Side means many things to many people. To the Christian it means a chance to serve, to befriend, and to win.”³⁷

Evangelism was necessary, but service and relationships were too.

A 1960 CSC assessment of the Sunday school program found that it struggled with achieving any measurable results.³⁸ Few of the Sunday schools had established connections with local churches, whether because the churches themselves were uninterested or students considered them unworthy of their time. The assessment concluded that if the work was to continue, such relationships needed to develop.

Part of the Sunday school program’s evolution involved changing the name to Chicago Negro Evangelism,³⁹ a change that may reveal a tendency among students at the time to believe that African American communities were in particular need of the Good News. It was not long, though, before it changed again. Early during the fall semester of 1963, Chicago Negro Evangelism became Inner-City Christian Action (ICCA). Sunday school classes continued but with a renewed focus on relationship-building, which CSC President Cy Campen ’64 said in a *Record* article, “often leads to effective communication of the gospel.” The basketball program, which had started a few years earlier⁴⁰, also continued and included a “teen club meeting” that allowed for discussion, and for the leaders to “see what the teenagers think.” The hope was that the discussion would allow the application of the gospel to be more relevant. With the name change also came a new emphasis in the group: ICCA partnered with the Wheaton College Department of Education to offer a tutorial program for Chicago students “having scholastic difficulty.” In anticipation—and showing an emphasis on action—Campen told *The Record* that “this year will be a year of study as well as action. The leaders of ICCA plan to take a close look at this work to see how they can make it more effective.”⁴¹

In the early 1960s, the CSC conducted other assessments of its ministries, which resulted in a new focus on training and establishing relationships with those who were being served. It had become apparent that having a better understanding of people’s needs increased the effectiveness of the CSC programs. Accompanying this awareness came an increased interest in projects that sought to aid those with social disadvantages, and so tutoring ministries became more prominent. By the 1970s, the CSC oversaw multiple tutoring

1963

Chicago Negro Evangelism becomes Inner-City Christian Action (ICCA): “ICCA hopes to eventually tie all the CSC Sunday schools to strong indigenous works.”

“To one who has had too much religion preached at him and religion which only disappoints time after time, a tract is a joke and a Bible is an excuse to sneer. There is only one thing that can meet the needs of 900,000 Negroes in Chicago. It is not charity, promises or hopes of heaven. It is a person who cares for them, each as an individual friend. It is a person who is willing to learn of past heartaches, frustrations and forgotten hopes; one who is an ally in the new hopes. It is a person who will respect each of them as the highest creation of God. Only when they see and know a ‘little Christ’ will they listen to the claims of the Lord Christ. The latter cannot effectively precede the other.”

— Roger Winter ’64, *The Record*, September 12, 1963

1964

Southwest (Adlai E. Stevenson) Expressway is completed

projects in Chicago, and it continued with jail ministry and street evangelism.

During the summer of 1967, the CSC sent 18 students to live in “Chicago’s Inner-city for two months,” a newspaper clipping reports. CSC Director Bill Lindberg ’62 was quoted as saying that the group’s purpose “was not to evangelize and accumulate conversion statistics, but to work with the whole man.” These students had trained with George Sheffer of Young Life and entered the city with the Young-Life-inspired goal to “earn the right to present the gospel.” During their two months living in Chicago, the group partnered with churches and connected with residents through Bible studies, sports, a coffee house, and the arts. The summer project was an impetus for CSC to add a class for unwed mothers in Oak Park and a program to draw African American students to Wheaton’s summer school program on campus.⁴² The CSC’s goals had become significantly more holistic.

In May 1968, Tom Skinner, an African American evangelist, spoke in Wheaton College’s chapel.⁴³ In recounting his biography, he said that in the middle of all of the various social concerns of his youth, he asked, “Where was the church?” He said he believed there were two basic extremes in how Christians responded to social concerns: the hippie and the hyper-Christian. The hippie didn’t have the guts to face life. The hyper-Christian—and with this description applause rang out in the Wheaton College audience—“called himself...a Bible-believing fundamental orthodox conservative evangelical Christian.”

Following the applause, Skinner continued his description of the “hyper-Christian”: he or she “had half a dozen Bible verses for every social problem that existed, but he would never, he would never get involved.” Skinner said that if you told this



Tower, 1968



Tower, 1970

type about all the problems in Harlem, they would say, “What those people up there need is a good dose of salvation” or “Christ is the answer.” But, Skinner said, “While the man said that Christ was the answer, I never saw him in Harlem, *making Christ the answer.*” For “Christ has always been the answer *through* somebody,” Skinner told these Wheaton students.

Skinner went on to criticize evangelicals who had been “willing to go across the ocean to reach the black man in Africa,” but had been “unwilling to spend one dime to cross the street of his own town.” To any student who would say, “What can we do?” Skinner posed an answer: “God has told you what to do: Go do it. And demonstrate on the streets of America once again, that the most revolutionary person, Jesus Christ, is able to revolutionize the world, proving by becoming involved with human beings and communicating to them, not paternalistically—‘I’ve come down here to help you dear colored people, and you ought to be happy about it.’ But to simply say, ‘Listen, as one beggar who’s found bread, I’d like to show another where to find some.’ That’s the communication of our time.”

Of course, the CSC had, the summer before, sent those 18 students to live and serve in the city, arguably earning the right to present the gospel. So Skinner’s message was not altogether new to all of the ears listening, but that it was proclaimed from the Chapel pulpit signals something of a shift in the emphasis of Wheaton’s engagement with the city, and also a shift in its

1966

Martin Luther King Jr. moves to Chicago, leads the Chicago Freedom Movement (Chicago open housing movement), and marches against segregation in education, housing, transportation, and employment

1969

Coffeehouse ministry is a precursor to summer city internships and residential ministry experiences

approach to evangelism.

Other groups tried the live-serve-learn approach too. An October 1969 article in *The Record* chronicled how 13 Wheaton College students spent the summer of 1969, not at Woodstock, but on Belden Street in north Chicago setting up a “coffee house and a crash pad in an attempt to penetrate this side of American society with the revolutionary words of Christ.” The article explains how the street was “low-rent” with “old ramshackle houses,” but was well-suited for its inhabitants which it called the “free community.” It was a “way station for hippies, heads, runaways, dropouts and artists, not to mention a vociferous den of hard-core revolutionaries.” This location, the article said, was “at best a hostile environment for the average Wheatonite.” The group worked in the coffee house ministry for the summer because they had realized that being there just for the weekends during the school year did not allow the opportunity for in-depth relationships. The group worked with a counseling program for runaway youth, facilitated a weekly “free feed,” and provided job and shelter placements. Moreover, “they found the best thing was to bring people into direct contact with the Word of God.” While the 13 participants had varying degrees of optimism after the summer, *The Record* reported that one participant said, “We helped people meet many of their needs including the spiritual.”⁴⁴

A year later, a young man from Iowa would attend the 1970 Urbana Conference and hear Tom Skinner give his now-famous talk, “Racism and World Evangelism.” That young man was Wayne Gordon ’75, who enrolled at Wheaton College in 1971. Why did he choose Wheaton? “Largely because it was close to Chicago,” he says in his book, *Making Neighborhoods Whole: A Handbook for Christian Community Development*.⁴⁵ As a student at Wheaton, Gordon took advantage of volunteer opportunities in

the city. Upon graduation, he moved to North Lawndale—which was at the time one of Chicago’s neighborhoods with the greatest poverty and crime rates—and became a school teacher and coach. He “wanted to lead Bible studies among high school youth, lead them to Christ and love them wholistically.” Those relationships ultimately grew into Lawndale Community Church in 1978;⁴⁶ Lawndale Christian Health Center in 1984, designed to address the lack of affordable, quality health care services in the neighborhood;⁴⁷ and later the Lawndale Christian Development Corporation in 1987, which has sought to benefit the neighborhood through economic empowerment, housing improvements, educational enrichments, and advocacy.⁴⁸ Because of Gordon’s work there, Lawndale has become a consistent location for Wheaton students to participate in Christian outreach ever since.

While at Wheaton, Gordon also watched as evangelicals gathered in Chicago’s Wabash Avenue YMCA in 1973 to prepare the *Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern*, which was signed by many Wheaton College alumni and faculty.

The *Declaration* called evangelicals to demonstrate God’s justice to an unjust American society, particularly in areas of social and economic rights of the poor and oppressed, racism, materialism, maldistribution of the nation’s wealth and services, militarism, nationalism, male domination, and imposed female passivity. A year later, *The Lausanne Covenant* would express a similar declaration on issues related to the social responsibilities of Christians: “Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty.” The manifesto went on to declare that “the message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist.”

Wheaton’s engagement with Chicago during this era took on a similar tone: evangelism remained central, but relational service and social justice were emphasized.

“AS ONE BEGGAR WHO’S FOUND BREAD, I’D LIKE TO SHOW ANOTHER WHERE TO FIND SOME.”

1972

CSC is “composed of a student cabinet and the chairmen of various ministries (Gospel and Folk Teams, Young Life, Youth For Christ, Campus Crusade, Operation Mobilization, Pioneer Girls, Christian Service Brigade, jail and hospital visitation, coffeehouse ministries, work with children with disabilities, tutoring projects, inner-city work);” 1972-73 College Catalog

1973

Evangelicals gather in Chicago to prepare the *Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern*

STUDY

EXPLORING AN URBANIZING WORLD

● 1980s TO THE EARLY 2000s



Photo courtesy of Center for Urban Engagement

W

AYNE GORDON'S TRAJECTORY and leadership in the late '70s and early '80s hints at another shift in the sort of engagement the College has had with the city. Gordon did not move to the city until after college, but when he moved there, he stayed. In fact, he has been there ever since. Up until the late 1980s, most of the College's engagement

with the city was temporary. It was day-trips. Weekend visits. Perhaps a week here and there. Of course, there were exceptions—particularly the few summer-length stays in the late '60s. But in general, from the College's founding until the 1980s, the engagement with the city was short-term.

That began to change with the launch of National City Ministries (NCM). Founded in 1984-85, NCM sent its first students into the city in 1985. One of the founders was David Doig '87, who is now president of Chicago Neighborhood Initiatives.⁴⁹ The student-run ministry sent students to key cities in America during the summer months. The CSC brochure recruiting students for the ministry in 1986 emphasized the whole gospel for the whole person:

“Recognizing the Biblical mandate to minister the whole gospel by meeting physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, this ministry is committed to making Christ’s presence real in the inner cities of America.”⁵⁰ Students met weekly throughout the year in preparation and then spent the entire summer in Chicago. NCM sent its final team in the summer of 2000, but was picked back up as Global Urban Partnerships in the summer of 2003.⁵¹

In the past, the city was a place where students went for a short time to provide for specific perceived needs, whether that be the gospel or a good meal. Opportunities for more sustained engagement increased from the time of National City Ministries and on into the 1990s, particularly for students, but also for Wheaton as an institution.

With sustained contact, the city came into focus as a place from which Wheaton students could learn—about the world, about cultures and society, about politics and religion, about business and more. It was also a place to learn about evangelism and ministry. And, the city itself was worthy of study.

In 1989, Wheaton launched its new Urban Studies program with its first director, Lyle Dorsett HON, who had been director of the Wade Center.⁵² With courses including “Chicago” and “Urban Policy Seminar,” the program offered a minor in Urban Studies and was intended to help Wheaton students prepare for an ever-urbanizing world.⁵³ “We’re living in a world that is rapidly urbanizing,” Dorsett told *The Record* in 1989. “You don’t understand this by viewing it from afar. We need to get into the city and get our fingers on the pulse-beat of the city.”⁵⁴ Dorsett, the college newspaper reported, hoped the program would “expand the horizons of all of our students, most of whom come from suburban backgrounds.”⁵⁵ Two years later, Helene Slessarev (now Slessarev-Jamir) became

the new director just after completing her Ph.D. in political science from the University of Chicago. She had lived in Chicago since 1977 and had worked previously as a union organizer, community organizer, economist for the Chicago Urban League, and consultant for Chicago’s minority business program.⁵⁶

The new Urban Studies program was created because the College recognized the significance of cities in an urbanized country. The 1992-93 catalog entry for Urban Studies introduces the program like so: “Large-scale urbanization came to America in the mid-nineteenth century. Today, America’s cities are centers of our nation’s life—centers of commerce, culture, education, and industry. Over 80 percent of all Americans are now urban dwellers, and over 50 percent live in approximately four dozen cities with populations of over one million each. To millions of people, the city is a place of opportunity. For others, it is the last step on a journey of oppression, poverty, and despair.”⁵⁷

The world had changed and Wheaton needed to augment its studies with social science perspectives to prepare its students for the urban world.

In 1992, the program began offering a certificate in Urban Studies in place of its minor. The College Catalog said that the program was “designed for students who have a heart for America’s inner cities and an interest in urban problems,” and that students would “be introduced to the way several social science disciplines understand urbanization.” The program was intentionally interdisciplinary in an effort to grapple with the “complexities of urban life and culture.”⁵⁸

This was also the beginning of what grew into today’s Wheaton in Chicago program. To complete the Urban Studies Certificate, students were required to do an internship, which included time spent living in Chicago, working in a



Helene Slessarev
Photo courtesy of Center for Urban Engagement

1983

Harold Washington becomes the first African American mayor

1984-5

National City Ministries is founded.

“Recognizing the Biblical mandate to minister the whole gospel by meeting physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, this ministry is committed to making Christ’s presence real in the inner cities of America.” — 1986 CSC Brochure

1989

Urban Studies Program formed and Lyle Dorsett is named director

“We’re living in a world that is rapidly urbanizing. You don’t understand this by viewing it from afar. We need to get into the city and get our fingers on the pulse-beat of the city.” — Lyle Dorsett HON, The Record, December 15, 1989

Minor in Urban Studies is offered

1991

Helene Slessarev (Jamir) replaces Dorsett as director of Urban Studies program

“I TAUGHT FOR EIGHT YEARS IN CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS, EXACTLY THREE MILES SOUTH OF MY HOUSE ON THE SAME STREET; A THREE-MILE DISTANCE BUT IT COULD HAVE BEEN 3,000.”

role that matched the student’s “abilities and interests.” The time living in Chicago could be a full semester or a summer. The program partnered with the Christian Center for Urban Studies in Chicago’s South Side, and students lived at the Olive Branch Mission.⁵⁹

In 1997, Wheaton in Chicago took on its name and moved from the South Side to Uptown. The new program offered students an opportunity for Chicago living and learning. The courses, according to the catalog, would be taught by Wheaton faculty, but also “practitioners from the city, while drawing on a rich array of outside speakers who are working in Chicago.” The curriculum combined the “disciplines of Bible and Christian education with the social sciences such as economics, political science, and sociology.” Students would also be exposed to a “wide range of Christian ministries.”⁶⁰

The next year, the Wheaton in Chicago program added the mandatory “Christian Thought” class to the other required course, “Chicago.” Then, the “Chicago” course became a prerequisite for the program, and “The City in Social Science Perspective” was added to the semester in the city.⁶¹

The balance was clear: in the city, students learned the basics of the Christian faith in their “Christian Thought” class, while they engaged the

city scientifically in “The City in Social Science Perspective.”

Another long-term educational relationship with the city also began in the 90s. At an alumni event in 1996, Ruth Brazalovich Mischkot ’92 told Professor of Education Jillian Lederhouse ’75 that if Wheaton College education students needed a school for student teaching, Wheaton should send them to Ruth’s school, Cleveland Elementary School. At the time, the department had stopped placing student teachers in Chicago because of failing to find enough mentor teachers

who saw potential in their elementary students. Wheaton’s education students’ engagement with the city was therefore limited to tutoring ministries through the Office of Christian Outreach (OCO), robust though they were. In contrast, Brazalovich told Lederhouse that the faculty at Cleveland loved their kids and believed in them and their families. As a result, Ruth said she was able to implement what she had learned in her Wheaton program in her daily classroom practice. Lederhouse met with the school’s principal and told him that Wheaton students were “very hard-working, but they may not have any urban experience.” According to Lederhouse, the principal said, “Your students have values. And that’s what I need most in my school.” In the fall of 1997, students in Wheaton’s education program began student teaching placements at Cleveland. The school building itself—with its beautiful hallways, auditorium, and Art Deco style—helped change students’ stereotypes of urban education.

“I was raised in Chicago. And I taught for eight years in Chicago Public Schools, exactly three miles south of my house on the same street; a three-mile distance but it could have been 3,000,” says Lederhouse. Her first year teaching in Chicago Public Schools, she “had a very rough start” with 37 first graders, because she had “no prior multicultural experience.” When the opportunity arose for her to begin working at Wheaton College, she struggled with the decision to leave the city. “I felt I made a difference in the city.” But she determined that if she “could help Wheaton students avoid the thousands of mistakes I made as a beginning urban teacher, it’d be worth it.” She ended up back at Wheaton in a faculty post, but her relationship with Cleveland has helped her maintain a connection to the city.

Wheaton’s long-term relationship with Cleveland continues strongly today, and in the 1990s, it grew alongside Wheaton’s other engagements with

1992

Semester-long internship in Chicago’s South Side and certificate in Urban Studies is offered

“Large-scale urbanization came to America in the mid-nineteenth century. Today, America’s cities are centers of our nation’s life—centers of commerce, culture, education, and industry. Over 80 percent of all Americans are now urban dwellers, and over 50 percent live in approximately four dozen cities with populations of over one million each. To millions of people, the city is a place of opportunity. For others, it is the last step on a journey of oppression, poverty, and despair.” — 1992-93 Wheaton College Catalog

1997

Wheaton in Chicago is named and launched in Uptown neighborhood

Elementary Education Department begins partnership with Cleveland Elementary School in Irving Park neighborhood

the city, namely the Urban Studies program and CSC. While educational experiences bloomed in this period, Christian service continued.

Corrie Sumner Johnson '96, who now serves the OCO as Assistant Director of Summer Programs, remembers that in the 1990s “you wouldn’t ask somebody, ‘Are you involved in the CSC ministry?’ Instead, you would say, ‘Which CSC program are you involved in?’” She remembers service being a prevalent part of the campus culture.⁶²

In 2006, Dr. Noah Toly '99, M.A. '12, became the director of Urban Studies. A Wheaton graduate who had just completed a Ph.D. in Urban Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Delaware, Toly was a natural choice. Looking back on his time at Wheaton, Toly believes National City Ministries was key to a shift in Wheaton’s engagement with Chicago. After NCM, Wheaton started moving from a “quick touch—I give you the answer—I give you the resource” approach, to a “longer engagement.”

Under Toly’s leadership, a full Urban Studies major and a minor were launched in 2013. The program, as the catalog attests, aimed to “foster understanding of the causes and consequences of the urban condition, the origins and implications of urban issues, and the presence and influence of the city in the world through interdisciplinary study and experiential learning.” Urban Studies courses were designed to introduce students to cities, urban studies methodologies, interdisciplinarity, issues of urban life, and the relationship between Christian faith and urban challenges. Also, all Urban Studies majors would be required to participate in the Wheaton in Chicago program. Students who graduated with the Urban Studies degree, according to the catalog, would be prepared for graduate study in the social sciences and also for employment in fields such as advocacy, community



and economic development, cultural affairs, ministry, policy, planning and design, public health, research, social enterprise, and social work.⁶³

“Eventually, the major and the minor and the fall semester Wheaton in Chicago program were so successful, so successfully engaging students, community partners, and other academic partners on campus, that the College needed to find a new umbrella for all of these elements,” says Toly. So, the College launched the Center for Urban Engagement (CUE) in 2015. With the new center came the opportunity to increase partnerships with faculty on campus. Wheaton College faculty who were doing scholarship related to CUE’s mission could now affiliate with CUE as “supporting faculty.” Early on, this included faculty from art, music, theology, history, environmental science, economics, sociology, anthropology, political science. While the new center didn’t cover every discipline on campus, it did cover each of the academic divisions. CUE also created an advisory board of scholars and practitioners in the city.

When Dr. Margaret DuPlissis Diddams '83 was hired as Provost in 2016, CUE took on new energy. Diddams grew up in East Rogers Park, and she remembers her childhood in the city fondly.⁶⁴ She remembers her parents taking

1998

“Wheaton in Chicago” first listed in catalog

2004

Millennium Park opens

2006

Noah Toly is named director of Urban Studies

her and her brother to Chicago museums, the zoo, plays, and concerts, and she remembers her summers “lazing away on Lake Michigan, checking out too many books from the public library, biking along the shoreline for miles and going to Cubs’ games.” But that isn’t all she remembers: “I also saw and sometimes experienced first-hand many of the issues that people associate with cities: poverty, addictions, murder, robbery, assaults, and indifferent education.” Both sides of the city, according to Diddams, “involve memories of people.”

As Provost, Diddams wants Wheaton students to have experiences in the city that are “fully orb’d”: “That means experiencing the excitement of Chicago arts, its sporting events, and the energy that is present in neighborhoods where people actually know their neighbors. It means taking public transportation everywhere as the great leveler of socio-economic status. It means we are not only studying poverty but coming alongside those who live in poverty.” This fully-orbed view of Chicago can only come from being present. “To know Chicago, you can’t study its urban life from afar or as a mere visitor. You have to let the people of Chicago touch your soul to truly understand their city.”⁶⁵

During their early conversations, Toly told Diddams that he had “discussions underway to move back to the South Side of the city—a sort of homecoming for Wheaton in Chicago.” That summer, in 2016, Toly was invited to a lunch with three people: Joel Hamernick, executive director of Sunshine Gospel Ministries in the Woodlawn neighborhood of Chicago; Steve Preston, who served on the boards of both Wheaton College and Sunshine Gospel Ministries, and had served previously as U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development under President George W. Bush; and Franklin Ballenger, who had previously worked in the Wheaton College Office of Christian Outreach and lived

"TO KNOW CHICAGO, YOU CAN'T STUDY ITS URBAN LIFE FROM AFAR OR AS A MERE VISITOR. YOU HAVE TO LET THE PEOPLE OF CHICAGO TOUCH YOUR SOUL TO TRULY UNDERSTAND THEIR CITY."

in Woodlawn. These three invited Toly to consider moving the Wheaton in Chicago program to the South Side to work alongside Sunshine Gospel Ministries, an organization in Woodlawn that offers ministries of discipleship, mercy, and justice.

“We didn’t put up a map of Chicago and pick a location; we were invited,” says Toly. Earlier, when the CUE Advisory Board considered where Wheaton in Chicago could move when its lease in Uptown ran out, they considered what kind of neighborhood it should be in, what kinds of partners should be present, what kind of access to public transit, etc. Woodlawn “checked all the boxes.”

“Janet Abu-Lughod described Chicago as having an elegant facade and a deeply shadowed backstage,” says Toly. “There are some places in the city where the elegant facade and deeply shadowed backstage are adjacent—Woodlawn is one of those places.”⁶⁶

“The energy of Margaret Diddams plus the invitation to Woodlawn accelerated Wheaton’s engagement with Chicago,” says Toly.

Through the 1990s and 2000s, Wheaton’s posture toward the city was more sustained and listening, with hands and ears open. Evangelism and service remained central, but urban studies was emphasized.

The renewed energy to establish deeper connections with community partners and facilitate longer engagement also hints at what might be to come.

2011

Last of Cabrini Green towers is torn down

2013

Urban Studies major and minor offered.

“... foster understanding of the causes and consequences of the urban condition, the origins and implications of urban issues, and the presence and influence of the city in the world through interdisciplinary study and experiential learning.” — 2013-14 Wheaton College Catalog

2015

Center for Urban Engagement (CUE) is launched

PRESENCE

ACADEMICALLY GROUNDED, PATIENT
CHRISTIAN SERVICE IN CITIES

● 2010s INTO THE FUTURE



Photo courtesy of Center for Urban Engagement

IN 2018, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH Sunshine Gospel Ministries and with the support of other community organizations, the Center for Urban Engagement relocated the Wheaton in Chicago program from the Uptown neighborhood on Chicago's North Side to the Woodlawn neighborhood in the South Side. With the move to Woodlawn came expanded facilities

and programs. In Uptown, there were 18 beds and a makeshift classroom; in Woodlawn, there are 32 student spaces, along with faculty offices, staff apartments, two classrooms, and a conference room.

The goal of CUE's initiatives and programs? "Rather than learning *about* our neighbors—learning *with* and learning *from* our neighbors; rather than serving—serving alongside our neighbors," says Toly.⁶⁷

Wheaton also launched its new Aequitas Program in Urban Leadership in September 2018. This honors-like program is a four-year, cohort-based, experiential program that educates excellent students to foster just, sustainable, and

flourishing urban communities through academic study, experiential learning, immersion programs, and Christian service.⁶⁸

Diddams, on the occasion of commissioning the first Aequitas cohort, told the new students that “You are not embarking on studying poverty, racism, crime, family life. You are coming alongside to understand people who are living in poverty, who must deal with crime and who have difficulties in their family life.” She said that “these are people who are the image bearers of God.” Moreover, the cohort’s studies would be a “sacred trust.” She also emphasized how important place was, reflecting on how the shift from the Uptown neighborhood to Woodlawn would not make a significant impact on the community the program was leaving. “We were occupying space rather than establishing a place. We were not embedded in the community.” In addition, Diddams spoke about how people see the city and how their perspectives predispose them to particular ways of approaching the communities. As an example, she said, “If you are motivated to help others, how are you likely to view that community? If you assume that a neighborhood is impoverished, are you likely to see solutions that are ‘place-less’ and will only be focused on some financial algorithm?” Finally, she reminded these freshman students: “Your education is not about changing others—it’s about changing you.”⁶⁹

Trustee Steve Preston—at the same event speaking to the same 11 students entering Aequitas—talked about how many policies and programs exist to address the needs of cities. Nevertheless, he told them, “While we know these efforts do great good for millions of people, somehow, many of the problems just persist and just get worse.” So, he said, the work of Aequitas was to “ask ourselves the tough questions and not be afraid to look at what we find.” He spoke of how he wanted the

students to find truth and to know what God will do with that truth: “He may simply be reshaping how you see your role in society. He may be using your insights to design effective solutions. He may be building convictions in you to call you into service. He may be leading you to uncover unpopular viewpoints, difficult truths that will lead us to a better place.”

Aequitas, Preston suggested, will prepare students for a “patient sort of engagement with the city.” He explained this patience further: “Too often, we cling to heart-felt rhetoric that leads to simplistic solutions. But the challenges are complex and multilayered, caught up in history, social systems, and political and economic structures. We must balance the urgency of helping one individual at a time with the patience to address systemic issues. We must prepare students with commitment and rigor to understand the issues and to advance solutions that will have a lasting and substantial impact.”⁷⁰

During fall 2019, CUE is also piloting the Emerald South Scholars’ Initiative, which brings students from Woodlawn and adjacent neighborhoods into Wheaton in Chicago courses and co-curricular activities for credit, for free. This means that Wheaton’s traditional, degree-seeking students and nontraditional, non-degree-seeking students will learn alongside and from one other.

Aequitas and the Emerald South Scholars’ Initiative signal the College’s commitment to Chicago. Wheaton is not seeing the city as a problem to solve or an opportunity to seize, but rather as a neighbor in a reciprocal relationship. This relationship takes into account Wheaton’s mission as a premier Christian liberal arts educational institution, as Wheaton students will learn *from* and *with* the city. Wheaton will also minister and serve *with* people in the city.⁷¹

Yulee Lee, who began as the new Director of the Office of Christian Outreach (OCO) in the fall of 2018, is also thinking deeply about Wheaton students’ evangelistic engagement with the city. She says there is still a passion for and value of evangelism among the students who she has observed, but “it looks different to different students depending on their lived experiences.” She also says that “students want to share the gospel and express their Christian faith, but, like many of us, they experience challenges with our increasingly polarized culture.” Lee believes it is more complicated in today’s

“TOO OFTEN, WE CLING TO HEART-FELT RHETORIC THAT LEADS TO SIMPLISTIC SOLUTIONS.”

2018

Aequitas Program in Urban Leadership is launched

“You are not embarking on studying poverty, racism, crime, family life. You are coming alongside to understand people who are living in poverty, who must deal with crime and who have difficulties in their family life.” — Margaret DuPlissis Diddams ’83 in an address to the first Aequitas cohort.

“Too often, we cling to heart-felt rhetoric that leads to simplistic solutions. But the challenges are complex and multilayered, caught up in history, social systems, and political and economic structures. We must balance the urgency of helping one individual at a time with the patience to address systemic issues. We must prepare students with commitment and rigor to understand the issues and to advance solutions that will have a lasting and substantial impact.” — Trustee Steve Preston in an address to the first Aequitas cohort.

world for students to navigate the differences in worldviews that exist among neighbors. “It’s encouraging, though, because students want to be ambassadors for Christ. I still see that conviction. Our office tries to equip them to live and share the Good News and then sends them out to do so while being mindful of the various contexts we’re entering into.”

Lee also realizes that Wheaton’s home in the suburbs could potentially influence how its students see the city. “There are many negative perceptions about the city, so our work is to help equip students to enter the city recognizing that God works everywhere, that he is doing great things in the city, and to equip our students to have eyes to see the good things that God is already doing,” she says. “Then, to seek how they might follow God into those good things he is already doing, to join him.” She believes that this takes a “learning posture, a more relational approach, coming alongside people and partners in the city.” For that reason, the OCO, like CUE, is seeking to grow partnerships with the churches in the city.⁷²

Toly agrees. “God is already at work in all of these communities; people there are already doing good work in God’s name,” he says. The problem, according to Toly, “when we go into one of these neighborhoods from the suburbs like we’ve got the answers, is that we implicitly signal that predominantly white evangelicalism is particularly in touch with the God of the universe, and others are not.” Rather, Toly says that Wheaton students and programs should come alongside churches in the city that are already doing evangelism, and learn from them. But not just with evangelism: “We need to learn from our partners’ priorities before we start introducing our own into the neighborhood. We’re not from the neighborhood. They are.” Before doing evangelism or service work in the city, Toly asks



Photo courtesy of Center for Urban Engagement

these questions: “Do we have something to learn about evangelism from people who are already there in the context? Do we have something to listen to first before we talk? Is God’s good work already going on in that neighborhood in ways we need to recognize before we have earned the right to just jump in?”

According to Toly, the trouble with assuming the city is a place of need and we have all of the answers is that, well, we don’t have all of the answers. Additionally, he asks by what standard has one determined the need: “Have we used a heuristic of race or poverty or class to decide that ‘those people’ probably don’t have the gospel?” If so, he contends, “That is just absurd.” A slower approach, one that starts with engaged listening and an open presence, allows Wheaton students to do evangelism well.

Toly also sees urban studies and evangelism as complementary. “The Urban Studies program, Wheaton in Chicago, all of the Center for Urban Engagement programs, and the Office of Christian Outreach—they are all coming at engagement with the city in fresh, important ways that are complementary with one another,” he says. “Even though at any given point in history one may be predominant, I think Wheaton College is built on the idea that both matter. And that’s the Wheaton College I know and love.”⁷³

2018

Wheaton in Chicago relocates to the Woodlawn neighborhood on the South Side of the city at the invitation of community partners

2019

CUE pilots the Emerald South Scholars’ Initiative, which brings students from Woodlawn and adjacent neighborhoods into Wheaton in Chicago courses and co-curricular activities for credit, for free.

CONCLUSION



Photo courtesy of Center for Urban Engagement

W

HILE THERE ARE COUNT-
less more ways in which
Wheaton College stu-
dents have engaged with
Chicago over the years,
this overview has at-

tempted to describe the major contours and vary-
ing emphases over time.

The development of these emphases—prox-
imity, evangelism, service, study, and presence—
is not completely linear, nor are the transitions
clean from one era to the next. The historical de-
velopment is like the musical form of theme and

variations, with one melody repeated in diffe-
ent iterations throughout the
course of the piece.

Today, when presence and partnership in the city are emphasized, Whea-
ton College students still participate in street evangelism in the city.⁷⁴ When
the emphasis shifted to urban studies, Wheaton didn't lose evangelism or
service—and the academic engagement also existed prior. As the develop-
ment occurred, each of these elements was shaped by the primary posture.
Urban Studies has changed its students' evangelistic and service-oriented
engagement with the city. Yet Wheaton's service and care for the people of
Chicago continues within the context of Wheaton's evangelistic drive and its
academic mission. Undoubtedly, Wheaton will continue to develop its rela-
tionship with the City of Big Shoulders, as the tower of Blanchard Hall will
continue to stand in relationship to the skyline of Chicago.

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