Admissions’ reforms put into place after investigation by state commission

By Sharita Forrest

“What do I tell my friends when they ask me about admissions at Illinois?” That was freshman Sara Cruse’s question for UI President B. Joseph White when White spoke at the University YMCA’s “Know Your University Forum” one Tuesday in September.

Cruse, an 18-year-old freshman from South Barrington, Ill., said that she and several friends applied early for admission in the fall semester 2009 and were placed on the deferred admissions list. Although Cruse eventually was admitted at Illinois, her friends were not.

When news stories over the spring and summer revealed that in recent years about 30-50 undergraduate applicants whose names were on a special list called Category I had gained admittance at Illinois because of who they knew, Cruse’s friends concluded, “Well, that’s why they weren’t admitted, Cruse said.

“If I tell them what I tell them,” White responded to Cruse; that the UI has abolished the controversial Category I admissions process following an investigation by the Admissions Review Commission, and the university was erecting a number of safeguards to bar against inappropriate influence in the admissions process and ensure that all applicants receive equal consideration.

The ARC, impaneled by Gov. Pat Quinn on June 6, reviewed documents over the summer. The commission concluded, “Well, that’s why” they weren’t admitted, Cruse said.

Among other recommendations, in addition to abolishing Category I, the ARC advised that the university was erecting a number of safeguards to bar against inappropriate influence in the admissions process and ensure that all applicants receive equal consideration.

Freshman Tyler Griffey, a varsity basketball player, gets a seasonal flu shot from Illinois Department of Public Health Director Dr. Damon T. Arnold during a public awareness event on campus in September.

Campus education and preparations – and luck – keep H1N1 flu under control – so far

Real test may come with onset of annual flu season

By Sharita Forrest

Even before some Illinois students had time to crack the spines on all those shiny new textbooks, students began trickling into, and then flooding, McKinley Health Center with complaints of fevers, body aches, sore throats and coughs. The flu had arrived – weeks ahead of the regular annual flu season.

But it was no surprise, as campus officials had been preparing for an outbreak of seasonal and/or H1N1 influenza shortly after fall classes began based upon the advice of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other public health officials.

As of the fourth week of September, more than 21,000 students at 267 U.S. colleges and universities had reported cases of influenza-like illnesses, according to the American College Health Association, a leadership and advocacy organization for collegiate health-care professionals.

Dr. Robert Palinkas, the director of McKinley Health Center, said that the first Illinois student with flu-like symptoms was treated on the first day of classes, Aug. 24. By the end of the first week, the count had surged to 100. By late September, more than 640 illing students with similar symptoms had sought treatment. About 30 new patients were seeking treatment every day.

When sniffiling, sneezing and aching students began filling up its waiting rooms, McKinley Health Center hired additional doctors and nurses, set up a separate waiting area for patients with possible H1N1 flu and began giving them surgical masks to help prevent airborne transmission.

To help contain the spread, all students with influenza-like illnesses are being encouraged to isolate themselves by returning to their family homes and the care of “Dr. Mom.” If going home is not an option, students are urged to isolate themselves in their campus residences or in one of 13 “sick rooms” or unused staff apartments that are being used to separate sick students from their peers.

In accordance with the CDC’s guidelines, campus health officials are urging people to stay away from work or classes until at least 24 hours after their fever has abated on its own.

“Most students do go home,” said James Rooney, the associate director for residential life in the Housing Division. “Sometimes, though, some students don’t understand the need for it because they’re young and healthy. We say, ‘We understand that you’re a dedicated, hard-working Illinois student and that you can’t afford to miss class for a few days – but neither can the people you’ll infect if you do stay on campus and keep going to class.’”

The students in isolation can order their meals from Dining Services’ menus, and the meals are delivered on disposable trays. The kitchens in the apartments also are stocked with bottles of water, sports drinks, soups and snacks, Rooney said.

As of late September, about 25 ailing students had used the sick rooms or apartments. Some students stayed only a night before returning to their family homes. The majority of students stayed for three to five days until they were well enough to return to their campus residences, Rooney said.

So far, demand has not exceeded the number of available spaces.

Before leaving McKinley Health Center, sick students are given a flu kit, which contains soups, thermometers, throat lozenges and other necessities, so they can go straight home without visiting stores to purchase those items – potentially exposing other people along the way.

McKinley began giving seasonal flu shots Sept. 14, about a month earlier than usual. Interest in getting vaccinated has been “unprecedented” this year, and vaccines are “going out 10 times faster...
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Sept. 10 at Urbana

A task force led by A. Christine Hurt, a professor in the College of Law, reviewed the ARC’s recommendations and developed proposals for changes. The proposals included a fire。“With the exception of creating the firewall to insulate admissions officers from undue influence, we have not changed the admissions policy of the UI,” Hurt said about the task force’s recommendations. “The Office of Undergraduate Admissions does a good job by and large in creating the best class that it can from all of the meritious applicants that we get. The task force members believe that the admissions criteria are sound, and that the practices of the Office of Undergraduate Admissions are sound. But we felt that this process was not transparent and that the best way to respond to that was to establish policies to preclude interference.”

The undergraduate admissions criteria and the appeals process for denied applicants now are easily accessible on the Office of Undergraduate Admissions’ Web site. The task force also developed a proposed code of ethical practice for UI employees to observe with respect to admissions.

“The is some sense that the boundaries weren’t entirely clearly previously, so many people innocently – with no thoughts of breaking the rules or compromising their own personal things like, Hey, my neighbor is a pretty good kid, and they’re likely to find themselves applying at Illinois,” Hurt said. “The code of ethical practice states that employees will not seek any kind of information on an applicant or try to interject any information about an applicant outside the formal process. We thought that the code was important because it becomes part of everyone’s training about what is is and isn’t proper with respect to work.”

While letters of recommendation are not permitted in undergraduate admissions, they are required for graduate and professional school programs, and those procedural differences are outlined in the firewall policy.

According to the policy, any communication by a third party to an admissions officer concerning an applicant file – other than third parties who are participating in a formal recommendation process – is not allowed. Any such attempted communication, either directly to an admissions officer or through a university employee or trustee, will trigger a reminder from the admissions officer that the communication is inappropriate. The third party will not receive any information nor will any information be inserted into the applicant file. Such inquiries also will be logged for future reference.

Over the past decade, interest in attending the state’s flagship public university has surged, with the number of freshman applicants soaring from 18,000 to 26,000 between 1998 and 2009. Consequently, increased competition for undergraduate spots sparked an increase in requests from influential supporters to re-evaluate or change admissions applications. In response to them, Herman told and other members of the University faculty–student senate when he discussed his actions in relation to admissions cases and the ARC’s investigation with senators at the start of the fall semester.

For fall 2009, the University campus has 31,209 undergraduates and 10,709 graduate students enrolled.

For admission for the fall 2010 semester, freshman applicants can file their applications from Sept. 1, 2009, to Jan. 2, 2010, and transfer students from Sept. 1 to March 1.

An online appeals system went live in late September, offering denied undergraduate applicants for the 2010-2011 academic year a straightforward mechanism for requesting that their applications be reconsidered. The appeals system, which was under development for about a year before its inception, formalized what was previously an informal appeals process whereby denied applicants usually e-mailed requests that their applications be re-evaluated, said Stacey Kostell, director of admissions in the Office of Undergraduate Admissions.

Now, denied applicants can download an Appeal of Admission Decision Form from a link on the Office of Undergraduate Admissions’ Web site and mail or fax it in.

To qualify for a second look by the admissions committee, however, a denied applicant must file a “new and compelling information that was not included on their application,” such as documentation explaining that a slump in their grades during their sophomore year in high school was an anomaly, caused by circumstances that they rectified and that they turned their academic performance around afterward, Kostell said.

About 200-300 undergraduates whose applications are not accepted files appeals every year, nearly all of which are denied.

In accordance with the ARC’s recommendation, an ad hoc committee of the board of trustees is conducting performance reviews of university personnel in relation to the Category I admissions controversy and is expected to report to the board at its Nov. 12 meeting. The Urbana faculty senate passed a resolution at its Sept. 14 meeting that recommended that both White and Herman be replaced. White resigned, effective Dec. 31. He announced his resignation Sept. 10 at Urbana Community and Business at the University campus and participate in the university’s $2.25 Brilliant Futures capital campaign, which continues through 2011.

Stanley G. Ikenberry, acting president at Illinois from 1979 to 1995, was appointed interim president designate effective immediately during a special board of trustees meeting Oct. 3 at the Urbana campus. He will work with White until White steps down. Ikenberry will serve as executive president, effective Jan. 1 and until White’s successor – the UI’s 17th president – takes office. The trustees hope to have a new president selected by May 2010 and to work on campus by the start of the fall 2010 semester.

When asked why he wanted the job again, Ikenberry replied: “I had a love affair with the UI that started 30 years ago and hasn’t abated since that time. I said all along that if I could help, if the university needed my help, that I would be happy and actually honored to help.

“I think this is an important time… This is going to be a very brief but I think a very important transition period. We’ll have challenges, but that’s true for any university across the country.”

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than we anticipated,” Palinkas said. “We’re given out about 2,000 so far, and during an entire flu season in the past we gave a total of about 7,000.”

McKinley is urging students and other members of the campus community to get vaccinated for this year’s flu and to disinfect frequently touched surfaces – such as staircase handrails, doorknobs, elevator buttons and the more than 500 pieces of cardio equipment at the ARC that people touch frequently.

Palinkas said that as of late September, there were fewer ailing students than he had expected to see, given the CDC’s predictions. In most cases, the flu has been mild to moderate and not an anomaly rather than a serious illness. Although three students were hospitalized, they all recovered and were discharged.

Ikenberry, noted that the campus has been successful in preparing for the flu season, and he noted that long stretch of cold months that confine people indoors, and comprise numerous holidays, gatherings and events that present myriad opportunities for transmitting and contracting viruses.

Flu

season with a variety of preparatory, educational and operational initiatives.

E-mail messages and posters across campus remind people to cover their coughs, wash their hands frequently and, if possible, stay home if they’re sick. Dispensers with hand sanitizers are prominently placed at the main desks in housing facilities, dining halls, labs, offices, the Activities and Recreation Center and other locations. Antibacterial keyboard wipes are available in computer labs.

Cleaning crews across campus are devoting extra attention to disinfecting surfaces – such as staircase handrails, doorknobs, elevator buttons and the more than 500 pieces of cardio equipment at the ARC that people touch frequently.

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The sky’s the limit: Aviation students take to the air

By Diane Yates

I na distant corner of the Urbana-Champaign campus, so far from the rest of the school that it is actually south of Champaign and Urbana, students are fulfilling a dream that, for most of them, began in childhood: They are learning to fly.

About 230 students are enrolled in the Institute of Aviation, at Willard Airport in Savoy. Most hope to be commercial pilots. Others want to get a private pilot’s license, which will allow them to fly alone or with family or friends, but not for hire.

Some students are pursuing a B.S. degree in aviation human factors. Others are majoring in business, engineering, communications or other campus programs.

For many students at the institute, the dream of flight began early. Senior Nadia Kountoures got her first glimpse of the glory of flight at age 8 or 9 while at the Chicago Air and Water Show. The Evanston native immediately “became obsessed” with flying, she said.

“I wanted to fly Blue Angels — fighter jets,” a Boy Scout leader took 12-year-old Jeffrey Beck up in a plane after Beck earned an aviation merit badge.

“We flew over our house in Decatur,” said Beck, now 20 and a junior. “I had never flown before in my life and I absolutely loved it. I just became hooked.”

Alice McCormack, a recent graduate of the institute, took her first flight at age 16 in a friend’s airplane and noticed that she couldn’t stop smiling.

“That I thought everyone would have that reaction to flying,” said McCormack, who grew up in St. Louis.

“When I found out that not everyone felt that way I thought, ‘Wait a minute, I should do this, not just for fun.’” She also earned a degree in business at Illinois, but found herself drawn most to aviation. She is now a flight instructor at the institute.

Sophomore Cole Goldenberg, of Chicago, had an uncle who was a pilot. Unlike his peers, however, Goldenberg doesn’t drive a car and is actually afraid of heights.

“I can’t stand near a window in a skyscraper or at the edge of a cliff, but I can fly an airplane,” he said.

Kountoures, Goldenberg and Beck are well on the way to achieving their goal of a career in flight.

Each student has a minimum of 50 flight hours attainable by most aviation students in their freshman year. Beck and Kountoures also have their instrument ratings, allowing them to fly “blind” in a fog or cloud, and to read the gauges and dials on the instrument panel as navigation aids. Kountoures also has her commercial rating and is a certified flight instructor.

Beck, a native of Decatur, Ill., got his pilot’s license before coming to Illinois, but was — eventually — grateful for the refresher course he had to take as a requirement of the program.

“At first I was a little irritated,” he said, “but the level of training that I got here (at the university) versus what I got with a private instructor (elsewhere) was really different. For example, my oral exam here to get my instrument rating was about two hours long. The exam that I took with my private instructor for my pilot’s license was less than 30 minutes.”

Unlike private-pilot training available at many airports, the Institute of Aviation at Illinois is a Part 141 training program, meaning it must comply with a more rigorous set of training regulations from the Federal Aviation Administration, said Laura Gerhold, an academic adviser at the institute.

Students have several options for pursuing a career in flight. They can get a B.S. in aviation human factors, which allows them to obtain their FAA private, instrument, commercial, multi-engine and Flight instructor certificates and ratings while also taking courses in cockpit resource management, aviation psychology and aviation accident investigation and analysis. They must also fulfill general education requirements and can concentrate in a related field, such as business or communications.

Or they can enter the two-year professional pilot program, in which they can obtain all of their pilot certificates and ratings while also pursuing a major in one of the colleges on campus. Beck, for example, is majoring in atmospheric sciences while also going for the professional pilot certificate. He wants to be a commercial pilot for an airline or corporation, and sees the atmospheric sciences degree as a good fit with that.

“And if something ever happened and I couldn’t fly, I know I could also do meteorology,” he said.

The one-on-one instruction students receive and the flight time in one of the institutes’ 30 propeller planes is costly and time-consuming. In addition to the regular fees and tuition, students pay on average about $5,000 each semester for their flight education. They go to ground school (two 90-minute lectures per week) and flight school (two hours a day, three days per week). They also must put in up to 15 hours of solo flight time each semester. Some of that time is spent soloing to another Midwestern airport and back.

Goldenberg and Beck both have vivid memories of their early cross-country flights. For Goldenberg, a flight in a rented plane over Lake Michigan looking west to the Chicago skyline was a peak experience. He took the flight just after getting his private pilot’s license his freshman year.

“That’s not something that I ever saw myself doing at age 18,” he said.

Beck made a more recent solo flight to Grand Rapids, Mich. Visibility was perfect on the way up, but on the return he got a chance to use his instrument training.

“There was this layer of small puffy clouds that had come in off of Lake Michigan, and I was punching in and out of clouds the whole way back,” he said.

It was the first time he had navigated using only his instruments without an instructor present, and it was a thrill, he said.

Kountoures is one of 14 women enrolled in institute programs at Illinois, a distinct minority. But women are a strong influence at the institute, she said.

“A lot of our instructors are women,” she said. “Our chief pilot is female and our academic adviser is too.”

Kountoures also is co-president of the local chapter of the International Organization Women in Aviation, and sees it as a great way to meet people in the industry.

McCormack participated in the 2007 Air Race Classic, a transcontinental race of teams of female pilots. She and her teammate, Dee Bond, from New Zealand, took sixth place out of a field of about 30 teams that year. Bond had flown the race before and “she kind of showed me the ropes,” McCormack said.

“It was great to meet women pilots that flew when women were not expected to be flying,” McCormack said.

“I met World War II WASPs (Women Airforce Service Pilots) and other phenomenal pilots.”

There are many other training and networking opportunities for students in aviation. Kountoures and Beck are members of the Illinois Flying Team. Members of the team test their skills, for instance, in navigation or precision landing. Beck and Kountoures also are on a committee that organizes the institute’s career fair, which brings alumni back to talk to students about the aviation industry.

Goldenberg, who is in the aviation human factors program, is also taking a class on leadership skills.

University constraints have forced the institute to accept fewer students this fall. But the institute also is offering fun flights, which allow any UI student to take a 30-minute flight with a flight instructor for $65.

Non-aviation students at the UI are sometimes surprised to learn that those in aviation begin their flight training on day two of their freshman year.

Beck said.

“People think that we go into this aviation program and then by our senior year we might get to hop on an airplane,” he said. “But you get solo flight time your first semester here. You get a license by the end of your second semester. I mean, it’s a four-year program but you don’t waste any time before you get in the airplane.”
Keep in touch: Text, tweet, talk

By Melissa Mitchell

Not so very long ago, college students’ transition to a more independent lifestyle was likely more defined and dramatic – for them and their parents – than it is today. That’s because after parents waved goodbye, it was still a time when they might not reconnect in a meaningful way until there was a turkey in the oven.

Today, students all but carry their parents off to college with them in their pockets. The cell phone, sometimes characterized by the media and others as “the longest umbilical cord,” keeps families tethered tighter than ever.

“When we went to college, there was a phone at the end of the hall, or we wrote the occasional letter home, usually asking for money,” said Julian Parrott, the director of the Division of General Studies at the UI. “Now, students and parents average 16 to 18 contacts a week, with most communicating two or three times a day.”

Besides the constant talking and texting, families also have a full menu of other communications technologies at their fingertips to keep the home-school lines open, from e-mail and instant messaging to social networking sites and video-chat scenarios.

Parrott, who also is the director of the Campus Center for Advising and Academic Services, said all that connectivity initially was a hot-button issue for many students and parents who wanted to control exactly how they communicated. “Three to four years ago, academic affairs people were battening down the hatches,” said Parrott, who noted that every time he attended a professional conference, at least four to five papers would address the fundamental dynamics and relationships regarding communications between parents and their students. (page 19, http://go.illinois.edu/parents)

“With more students using cell phones as a sort of bond, they realized that YouTube was a fairly logical and simple tool for most people. But with the rise in popularity of social networking among people of all ages, even e-mails are getting left in the dust. ‘Many students, abandoning the ‘e-card,’ simply send a birthday e-mail or Facebook message,” he said. “We’ve grown from ‘When you care enough to send the very best’ to ‘We’re just as good enough to send the very fastest.’”

Unlike others who maintain communication quality is decreasing, Baron is relatively unconcerned: “I don’t think we’re losing much at all,” he said. “More people e-mail than ever wrote letters, and so our written communications are increasing.”

“Since my parents are in their ‘60s, and even though Mom has arthritis, she learned to text,” said Shirley, whose son Ryan Rogers is a freshman at the University of Illinois. “I gave my share of papers about ‘helicopter parents,’ and that engagement is always been for them,” said Becky Galardy, the assistant director of the Center for Advising and Academic Services, said all that connectivity initially was a hot-button issue for many students and parents who wanted to control exactly how they communicated. “Three to four years ago, academic affairs people were battening down the hatches,” said Parrott, who noted that every time he attended a professional conference, at least four to five papers would address the fundamental dynamics and relationships regarding communications between parents and their students. (page 19, http://go.illinois.edu/parents)

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To me, being able to stay connected to my parents at home in many forms of communication is very beneficial because not only do I have a stronger, more flexible safety net. I am able to pick and choose the context of how I want to deliver certain information and handle different situations.

“When I call, the conversations almost always are perfectly smooth, and I walk away feeling closer to home – not overwhelmed by the sudden rush of whatever they needed to convey. The defects of communication are still I haven’t perfected each parents’ knowledge of the various forms of communication.”

But, he notes, they’re learning. Rivera is one of those rare young people who doesn’t mind having his mom as a Facebook friend. He’s trying to get her up to speed so they can share photos and casual conversation on the site, but both concede it’s taking some time for Mom to get with the program.

“I got a text from him that just said ‘chk fbck’ … that was it,” said Gidel, who was baffled by the message’s meaning. “Then I thought, oh … ‘check Facebook!’ But I still didn’t know what I was supposed to look at. It turned out to be something about a Ziggy Marley song we’d been talking about.”

Since the two have always relied on music and videos as a sort of bond, they realized that YouTube could serve as a means of staying on the same page. “I told him my YouTube name so I could keep up with the videos he’s checking out.”

Mother and son also discovered yet another unusual way to use technology to relate to a distance. Recently, Rivera alerted his mom that he and his girlfriend were reading on the Quad, in view of the university’s Quad Cam.

“So I immediately went online to see them, sent the link to friends, copied a still image of it onto my Facebook wall, and recorded the video and uploaded it to YouTube,” Gidel said. “That was so cool.”
Revamped pre-law advising program stresses realism, success

By Jan Dennis

C aney Hawkins Ash has had his sights on law school since he was 10 years old, swayed by an indelible brush with a member of his church who practiced law and also helped craft it as a Louisiana state senator.

“We have been fascinated by law ever since,” said Ash, a University of Illinois graduate student from Baton Rouge, La. “Law touches every person in every field in every walk of life. It’s the one field that binds all of us.”

Ash says his nearly lifelong dream of landing next fall at Harvard, Yale or one of more than a dozen other law schools on his wish list has been bolstered by a retooled pre-law advising program that rolled out on the Urbana-Champaign campus a year ago.

In its first year, 82 percent of nearly 300 UI seniors who applied to law school were accepted, well above the average national acceptance rate of 56 percent.

Students credit finely tuned, attention-grabbing applications honed during meetings with an advising staff led by Jamie Thomas, who practiced law for three years before becoming the first director of the revamped program last fall.

“At the end of the day, your application and resume amount to a 30-second commercial and that’s what admissions officials judge you by,” said Ash, who will apply to 20 law schools this fall. “Jamie made sure mine isn’t one they’d just change the channel on.”

The ramped-up program is the latest incarnation of pre-law advising services that date back to the 1960s at the UI, home of one of the nation’s top-ranked law schools.

Until last year, the program was based in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, led by an assistant dean who juggled pre-law advising among other administrative and teaching duties, said Julian Parrott, assistant provost and director of the Campus Center for Advising and Academic Services.

The program also has earned support from the UI College of Law, which is funding a graduate assistant who helps Thomas and fellow adviser Judy Argenti, who also practiced law before joining the program.

“I have been very pleased with the new pre-law advising program,” said Paul Pless, the college’s assistant dean of administration and financial aid.

“A Jamie has been a great contact for the College of Law and has really taken the initiative in learning more about our application process.”

Ash, vice president of the Illinois Student Senate, says working with the program provided self-discovery, as well as an application he expects will land him in law school and, ultimately, government service.

“The confidence and self-esteem you have when you walk out of that office is an intangible that makes the program invaluable,” he said. “I will count this experience as a success, regardless of what those admission acceptances or denials might say.”
Zip around town in short-term rental cars
A fleet of six Zipcars – including a Mazda 3 called Millikan and a Toyota Matrix called Martynas that are assigned to campus – went into service in Champaign and Urbana on Jan. 13.

The cars, which rent for $8 an hour or $66 a day, offer drivers the convenience of a vehicle when they need one, without the additional expenses of fuel, maintenance and insurance.

Drivers affiliated with the UI, including students who are at least 18 years of age, can join the program for an annual fee of $55. Members can drive up to 140 free miles per day; additional miles cost 35 cents per mile.

**It’s** a bright, cloudless Saturday morning in mid-September – a perfect day to watch an Illini football game. But this morning, 10 volunteers – a mix of undergraduate and graduate students – have gathered on a 2-acre plot of sun-drenched farmland 2 miles southeast of Memorial Stadium to pick tomatoes at the new student-operated farm, a cooperative venture of the university’s department of natural resources and environmental sciences, the Horticulture Club and Students for Environmental Concerns.

Located on the South Farms, near the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Windsor Road in Urbana, the farm is in its first year of operation. It was funded by a $50,000 grant from the Student Sustainability Committee, which decides how to spend the $5 per semester sustainability fee paid by students to support eco-friendly projects on campus.

Zach Grant, a recent graduate of the UI with a master’s in horticulture, manages the farm. Two student interns helped tend crops throughout the summer, he said. With school back in session, he relies primarily on student volunteers to help with the fall harvest.

“I’ve been very happy with the amount of student help we’ve had, considering it’s our first year and not many people know about the farm,” Grant said. “It’s a great way to meet people – when we’re not planting, weeding or harvesting, you’ll hear a lot of talk and laughter. It’s an enjoyable way to spend some time outdoors in nature, while also knowing that you’re contributing to making the campus more sustainable.”

Volunteers are even allowed to sample the crop and are usually able to take some home with them, a boon for budget-conscious students.

“We have so much, it’s my way of saying thanks for helping out,” Grant said.

Among the volunteers this September morning is Anthony Larson, a senior from Lake Forest, Ill., majoring in environmental economics and policy in the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences. Larson says having a student-run farm is “one of those small things that will make both the environment and the university better.”

“The carbon benefits from the transportation alone is pretty incredible,” he said. “Instead of getting food trucked in from thousands of miles away, it’s coming from just down the road. It also tastes better when it’s freshly picked and only a day or two from the field to your plate rather than a few weeks, or even a month.”

Larson, who’s also the president of Students for Environmental Concerns, says that with just a couple acres, the farm is already making an impact – on palates and minds.

“It’s a really good way to get students involved and learning about the importance of having local foods,” he said. “Having students come out and work on the farm for a few hours is a big educational benefit that you don’t necessarily get by sitting in a classroom.”

Grant said the crops are selected with the input of University Housing’s Dining Services, which oversees the menus of the Urbana campus’s seven dining halls. The farm’s first batch of fresh salad greens appeared on plates for a perfect day to watch an Illini football game.

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“It’s a really good way to get students involved and learning about the importance of having local foods. Having students come out and work on the farm for a few hours is a big educational benefit that you don’t necessarily get by sitting in a classroom.”

— Anthony Larson, senior from Lake Forest
Zipcar members age 21 and older can access Zipcars at any location around the world where Zipcar has a fleet; students age 18-20 can only rent Zipcars in Champaign and Urbana. In addition to having had a valid license for at least a year, a potential member also must meet Zipcar's safe driver criteria: no more than two moving violations or accidents (or both) in the past three years and no more than one moving violation or accident in the past 18 months. Potential members also cannot have had a major violation, such as being ticketed for driving under the influence or driving with a suspended or revoked license, during the past three years.

The UI, the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District and the cities of Champaign and Urbana created an interagency partnership to bring the Zipcar program to town. The interagency agreement includes a revenue guarantee for Zipcar. Each car will need to be used at least 40 hours a week during two successive calendar quarters to eliminate the guarantee. The Champaign-Urbana community is Zipcar's smallest market thus far. According to Zipcar, every Zipcar removes 15-20 private vehicles from the road. More information is available at www.zipcar.com/uillinois/.

During finals week last semester. Now, tomatoes, summer squash, sweet corn, pepper, herbs and melons have been harvested for use in fall recipes. About 300 fruit trees have been planted: They will produce next fall, at the earliest.

After zooming past the 8 ton mark back in May, Grant said his informal goal is to harvest 20,000 pounds of produce before the first frost, which usually occurs in the second week in October in Central Illinois. The plan for next year is to make the yield “not necessarily bigger, but more diverse,” he said.

“We’ll probably do about 3 acres of outdoor production and install 10,000 square-feet of high tunnels, which are passive heated solar greenhouses that you can use to link the whole season together,” Grant said. “That means we’ll be able to grow salad greens in the winter. Hopefully, we’ll have something to bring to the residence halls throughout the entire year.”

Grant has other ambitions for the farm, including using biodiesel refined from the dining halls’ used cooking oil to fuel the van that transports the produce, making it a near-complete loop of sustainability. Eventually, he hopes the farm will grow enough to provide the majority of produce dining halls need, as well as becoming a financially sustainable start-up business that can cater to the campus community.

In the meantime, Grant said, it provides practical experience for students interested in learning more about sustainable food production. The majority of student volunteers may not pursue a career in agriculture, but their time on the farm may inspire them to cultivate their own fruit, vegetable or herb gardens in their own backyards, or to think twice about where the food they consume comes from, he said.

Kyle Wanner, a sophomore majoring in resource ecology from Mokena, Ill., and a first-time volunteer, said he was inspired to get up early on a Saturday morning because he’s “really interested in the environment, and I think it’s a really good idea to make the campus more sustainable.”

Jordan Whicker, a senior majoring in East Asian languages and cultures from Urbana, said creating a more sustainable campus is what brought him out to his first student-farm harvest.

“It really seems a shame that we haven’t been doing this for the past 20 years,” he said. “We’ve got so many great resources out here in terms of farmland, and the soil can’t be beat. I’m excited they’re doing this and it’s cool to be a part of it.”

Student farm manager Zach Grant (with beard) examines tomatoes during a sorting session, before the produce is taken to the Dining Services kitchen. He’s assisted by, from left, garden intern Christopher Kaiser and volunteers Brian Kalal, a senior in recreation, sport and tourism, and Erin Harper, a junior in mechanical engineering.
Ravioli, rigatoni, mantacaccio, spaghetti, pizza. Just saying the words can make you hungry. What is it about Italian food? And what can the Italians teach us about food?

Seventeen students went to the source for answers last summer, spending 3 1/2 busy weeks in historic Rome and the Cilento region in the south, all of it part of a course focused on food and the country’s rich food culture. They ate, of course, and sampled ... and ate some more. And went to lectures about the history, economics and social customs of food in Italy, most delivered by professor Fabio Farascolli, who also served as a guide to Rome’s foodscape.

But they also spent hands-on time at farms and a vineyard, visited a dock where locals came each day for fresh seafood, toured the business of a caterer who sometimes serves the Vatican, and got lessons and a meal from celebrity chef Laura Ravaoli, described as the Rachael Ray of Italy. They made their own bread, picked wheat and grapes, saw how authentic mozzarella cheese is made from the milk of water buffalo, and got lessons on olive oil and artichokes and different styles of pizza. They immersed themselves in Italian food culture.

No, this wasn’t part of a new UI culinary institute, but rather a study-abroad advertising course, “Branding Italian Cuisine.” (http://will.illinois.edu/)

The immersion was necessary because branding a product or place, for the purpose of selling others on it, requires understanding it from the ground up, says Diana Mincyte, the advertising professor who led the course. It’s learning the “narrative” of whatever product or thing you’re trying to sell, she said, to get to the “productization of meaning.”

The trip “we’re a bunch of frauds,” Mincyte said on the way back from the trip. “We know nothing. We didn’t go into the local shops and you’ll see ... types of pasta,” Necastro said. “You know how much water they use, ... that’s all that it is, ... the Italian food they knew. “Most of the food students ate, in places that our guides led us to, was very unfamiliar,” Mincyte said. “They had no idea what it was.”

By Craig Chamberlain

Listen to performances any time
If you missed the “Beyond Cool” performance of Mike Davis’ “Bopplicity” at last year’s Alturas Music Barn Festival, or the Opera Program’s production of “Cosi fan tutte” last spring at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, all is not lost. Those performances — and many more by faculty members, students and guest artists of the UI School of Music — are accessible online through the UI School of Music’s new Media Center at www.music.uiuc.edu/media. A virtual trove of archival performances — some audio-only, some video — went live on the school’s website in March.

“This is a concerted effort — no pun intended — to have all of our flagship ensembles and faculty recitals accessible to the world,” said Karl Kramer, the school’s director.

In addition to past performances by faculty and guests artists, the site features concerts by university bands, orchestras and choirs, as well as opera productions. Also featured are selections from programs of annual events, including the Alturas Music Barn and Summer Jazz Festivals.

Kramer said the site’s intended audience is broad and diverse. “There’s a huge audience — from current university students and faculty and staff members to alumni, researchers, prospective faculty and the community.”

A taste of Italy: Advertising students learn first hand

“A key thing that I really became aware of through this trip was how different our relationship to food is here compared to theirs,” she said. She saw a closer bond to the animal and the land, a focus on freshness, knowing where your food comes from, and care in preparation. “It’s just real simple, quality fresh food, where you can really sense the ingredients,” she said.

For Necastro, who prefers her food organic, it was ideal. “A key thing that I really became aware of through this trip was how different our relationship to food is here compared to theirs,” she said. She saw a closer bond to the animal and the land, a focus on freshness, knowing where your food comes from, and care in preparation. “It’s just real simple, quality fresh food, where you can really sense the ingredients,” she said.

For Spizzi, who once had her eye on culinary school, and thought about it again several times during the trip, there weren’t enough superlatives. The olive oil was “amazing,” the coffee “phenomenal.” “I think they just take pride in what they do,” she said. They don’t focus on technology and mass production like we do. ... It shocks me that they’re able to maintain that.”

Both students also were struck by the social life that surrounds food in Italy. “They embrace the whole process and use it more as a social tool,” Spizzi said. “They have these three-hour-long meals and nothing’s rushed.”

Mincyte taught the spring course that prepared students for the trip, and led the trip itself, but it would not have been possible without GustoLab, a school in Rome devoted to educating foreign students and tourists about Italian food culture. “These kinds of experiences, you would spend years living there and you wouldn’t be able to find,” Mincyte said, “but because they are focusing on food education and gastronomy, they have these networks that we were able to plug into.”

Students on their first group dinner on their own in Rome.
Campus improves emergency communication system
The UI crisis-management team switched to a new provider last semester called MyStateSA for the emergency text and e-mail notification system. The new system has several improved features, including faster delivery times, easier registration and greater integrity in times of crisis because it is hosted off campus.

Another significant change is that the new emergency notifications system allows students to invite two additional contacts to receive e-mail and text-message notifications.

Students have been asked to register or review their registration for emergency notifications. If parents want to receive the same emergency messages indicating an imminent threat to the safety and security of the campus community, their son or daughter must enter the parents’ e-mail address as an additional contact. Parents will receive an e-mail with instructions for completing the registration online.

There will be occasional tests of the system, and alerts will be sent in advance of the tests.

Registration for emergency notifications will not put parents’ information on any other list or register them for any other campus communications. If parents choose not to receive emergency messages, the university’s homepage – illinois.edu – will have the latest information in emergencies.

First Class
Online chemistry course offers freedom and flexibility
By James E. Knoepfel

Chemistry students at the UI can now sleep through class and still ace the course.

Provided they’re awake when taking the course online.

Begun last year on a trial basis, the new online organic chemistry course has received an enthusiastic response from both students and faculty members. The course is the “wave of the future,” said its designer, Jeff Moore, the Pürchison-Mallory Professor of Chemistry at the UI. “It’s a model that would work well for many large lecture courses, especially those in the physical and life sciences.”

Organic chemistry is a foundational course for subjects ranging from astrophysics to zymology. Each year, about a thousand students on campus must take the class.

Faced with growing enrollment and limited classroom size, Moore, who collaborated with two other UI researchers to develop self-healing plastics, turned his creativity to improving chemistry education at the university.

First taught to 37 students in the summer of 2008, and again in the fall of 2008 for 181 students, the online chemistry course currently has an enrollment of 714 students. Most of the students are at the UI, but some are as far away as Pakistan.

The backbone of the course is a series of webcasts, which students can watch on their computers or on their iPhones.

For the webcasts, content from each of Moore’s traditional 50-minute lectures was used to create five five-minute segments. Each segment covers a specific topic. Students can easily find and review any of the dozens of archived five-minute lectures.

Hyperlinked class notes also are readily accessible online. And, because information once confined to library shelves is now available over the Internet, students need not purchase an expensive textbook for the course.

“What’s fascinating about chemistry,” said Nina Hosmane, a junior from DeKalb, Ill., “is that there are organic compounds in the food we eat, the clothes we wear, and the drugs we take. Chemistry is everywhere.”

Hosmane, who is majoring in molecular and cellular biology, has taken UI chemistry courses in both the traditional, large lecture hall format, and in the online format.

“The online class was excellent,” Hosmane said. “I would take it again in a heartbeat.”

Now a supplemental instructor leader for the online course, Hosmane offers four in-person help sessions a week, each lasting about an hour.

“I love being able to help others,” she said. “I’ve been in these students’ shoes. I know what they are going through.”

In addition to the in-person help sessions, students also can participate in online discussion sessions. Within a virtual classroom of about 60 students moderated by such as Hosmane first review their class notes, the students float from room to room, seeing how the students are doing and offering help when needed,” Hosmane said. “I can see their ‘desktops,’ and I can move their cursors. It’s sort of like talking on the phone.”

Toward the end of the online session, the students are brought back together for a final discussion and review.

Tyler Harpole, a senior from Jacksonville, Ill., took the online chemistry course during the fall 2008 semester. With a double major—one in food science and human nutrition, the other in molecular and cellular biology—Harpole has taken several large lecture classes with more than 500 students in attendance. The online class seemed more personable, he said, and offered more freedom and flexibility.

“Rather than demanding a certain time slot, the online class works with your schedule,” Harpole said.

“You can watch the lectures when you want to. And you can work on homework assignments when you want to. Also, virtual office hours are much more convenient than trekking across campus to meet with your professor.”

To complete homework assignments, the students break into small groups in virtual classrooms. Within their classrooms, students can communicate with one another by audio, video and by sharing desktops.

Commercially available software called ACE Organic allows students to draw organic structures in response to homework problems.

The software analyzes the student’s response, and provides immediate, helpful feedback.

Alex Silvia, a senior from Lexington, Ky., also provided the online chemistry course. While working toward his major in human nutrition and his minor in chemistry, Silvia took several large classes in which the lecture hall was filled with hundreds of students. What he appreciated most about the online course was the accommodating class schedule.

“With online courses, the class is whenever you want it to be,” Silvia said. “Instead of getting up to attend an early class, I could review the lecture material later, when I was more alert.”

Silvia took the online chemistry class during the fall 2008 semester. This semester, he is working for the class as an exam proctor, a supervisory role made somewhat more difficult by the lack of direct access.

Exam questions are drawn from contemporary chemical literature, and are designed to test students’ understanding and reasoning abilities, in a format that resembles real-world problem solving, class instructor Moore said. “Students must diagnose incorrect responses and find solutions, just as a research scientist would do in the laboratory.”

To take their exams, students go to an assigned computer lab. During the exam, students may freely use online resources such as online journals and dictionaries. They must, however, test or e-mail a friend for an answer.

Proctors, such as Silvia, keep watch for signs of cheating. If suspicions arise, the proctors can notify Moore, who then can compare the students’ computer screens. If two computer lab neighbors are working on the same test page, and producing the same answers, further action can be taken.

For each exam question, students receive credit only if they find an acceptable solution, and they are scored according to how many attempts it takes them to reach that solution.

“This testing method forces you to know your chemistry,” Harpole said. “Some students know it better than others, and they get the correct answer on their first try, rather than their seventh. They lose one point for each failed attempt at the correct answer.”

With ACE Organic, exam answers can be checked instantly, and students are immediately informed whether their responses are correct or incorrect. “As a result, there is no ambiguity in the grading process or the grade,” Moore said.

Moore’s online chemistry class also has appealed to students off campus.

“During the fall 2008 semester, this semester we have a collaborating professor in Pakistan who has 20 students taking the class,” Hosmane said. “His students are in our online discussion sessions with our American students. Our noon discussions here is at 11 a.m. in Pakistan.”

This could be the beginning of a network of professors and students across institutional and national borders all learning together, Moore said.

“A close abundance of the globe join in, students will have online access to professional help come 24 hours a day, seven days a week,” Moore said. “That’s not just information on demand in the virtual world, but knowledge on demand.”

Photo by L. Brian Stauffer

Junior Nina Hosmane is a supplemental instructor leader for chemistry professor Jeff Moore’s new online organic chemistry class that has 714 students enrolled, including 20 in Pakistan.
Students rally with governor for state MAP grant support

By Sharita Forrest

A

though there wasn’t a cloud in the sky, a storm was brewing on the UI Quad one sunny day in early October.

A few blocks away, an exhibit at the Krannert Art Museum celebrated the democracy of higher education through President Abraham Lincoln's signing of the Morrill Act in 1862, which created land-grant universities such as the UI.

In addition to the museum, people of modest means gathered around the state to demonstrate public support for the Monetary Award Program, Illinois' primary need-based financial aid program.

Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn led the Oct. 7 rally at the Quad, the sixth rally to be held around the state to speak to the crowd about the importance of MAP grants.

“Does that sound right to you?” Washington asked the crowd to resounding applause and shouts. “Does that sound American?”

Washington urged students to contact their legislators directly.

“Education should not be restricted to the wealthy. If we do not take action and reinstate the MAP grant, the General Assembly will send the message to prospective college students all across the state that college is not for rich folk, that prospective students shouldn’t even bother to apply because they can’t afford it.”

“Jobs follow brainpower. And we’ve got to have people who can invent new products, start new businesses and go in and do complex jobs and carry them out with distinction – and thousands and thousands of Illinois graduates have done just that.”

 Members of the Illinois Student Senate presented Quinn with a resolution – which was passed unanimously by the Urbana-Champaign faculty-student senate at its Oct. 5 meeting — that called upon Quinn and the General Assembly to restore the MAP funding so that students could be assured they could continue their educations in the spring.

At a rally and town hall meeting at the UI, supporters hoped to persuade members of the Illinois General Assembly to restate the Monetary Award Program grants. About 5,700 UI students depend on the grants to subsidize their educations.

Quinn urged people to “use the power of democracy” to mobilize students, parents and educators to lobby their state legislators.

Several students from the UI and Parkland College spoke to the crowd about the importance of the grants to students like them – students from low-income families, for whom the scholarships are their tickets out of poverty.

According to ISAC, which administers the MAP and other financial aid programs, 47 percent of students who receive MAP grants come from households with annual incomes of less than $20,000, and 30 percent are from households that make less than $40,000 annually.

Edward Washington, a freshman in political science, criticized the legislature’s decision to eliminate the MAP funding for the spring semester.

“Illinois needs smart people who can move the economy forward,” he said. “Jobs follow brainpower. And we’ve got to have people who can invent new products, start new businesses and go in and do complex jobs and carry them out with distinction – and thousands and thousands of Illinois graduates have done just that.”

Quinn is the principle that no matter where you come from, if you work hard you can achieve your dreams.

The rallies and public hearings were sponsored by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission as part of its “Save Illinois MAP grants campaign,” aimed at mobilizing students, parents and educators to lobby their state legislators.

Several students from the UI and Parkland College spoke to the crowd about the importance of the grants to students like them – students from low-income families, for whom the scholarships are their tickets out of poverty.

According to ISAC, which administers the MAP and other financial aid programs, 47 percent of students who receive MAP grants come from households with annual incomes of less than $20,000, and 30 percent are from households that make less than $40,000 annually.

Edward Washington, a freshman in political science, said: “We had an overwhelmingly positive response,” she said, but added that after the pilot program ended, the senate had no way of funding its continuation.
Program helps transfer students transition to UI

About 25 students participated in a pilot program last academic year that the UI is conducting in conjunction with Parkland College in Champaign to help transfer students make the transition from community college to the university.

The Parkland Pathways to Illinois program is a dual-enrollment, dual-admission program developed by the UI and Parkland that the UI plans to adopt and offer at partnering community colleges throughout Illinois within the next two years.

Through Pathways, qualified students take one class per semester on the UI campus as non-degree students while earning their associate’s degrees as full-time students at Parkland. During their final semester at Parkland, students apply for admission to the UI as transfer students. If they’ve maintained a competitive grade-point average for their intended major at Illinois, they are guaranteed admission to Illinois in that program.

For the courses that the students take at Illinois, “we tried to stipulate courses that aren’t available at Parkland to add value to their educational experience,” said Keith Marshall, associate provost for enrollment management at Illinois. “Students also have the opportunity to live in the UI’s residence halls, and have access to student resources such as libraries and computer labs. Our goals are to create a seamless and successful transition to the UI.”

**Please post**

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<td>May 13</td>
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<td>Commencement</td>
<td>May 15</td>
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**Administrative posts**

**Robyn Deterding**
Director
Division of Campus Recreation

Activities and Recreation Center
201 Peabody Drive
Champaign, IL 61820
217-333-3513
rdeterdi@illinois.edu

Supervises the campus “playground,” the Division of Campus Recreation, which offers programs in aquatics, club sports, group fitness, ice skating, intramural activities, outdoor adventures, personal training, wellness and special events.

**Robert Easter**
Interim Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
217 Swanlund Administration Building
601 E. John St.
Champaign, IL 61820
217-244-4545
provest@illinois.edu

As the chief academic and budget officer for the campus, the provost oversees academic and budgetary policy and priorities, ensures the quality of the faculty and student body, and maintains educational excellence. All of the deans and directors of academic units report to the provost. Easter, dean of the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences and a professor of animal sciences, was named interim provost in July.

**Keith Marshall**
Associate Provost for Enrollment Management
204 Swanlund Administration Building
601 E. John St.
Champaign, IL 61820
217-244-8906
keithmar@illinois.edu

Responsible for the campus’s enrollment management strategy, including oversight of the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, Office of the Registrar and Office of Student Financial Aid. He also holds an appointment as adjunct assistant professor in the department of sociology and teaches an occasional course on racial identity formation.

**C. Renee Romano**
Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs
120 Swanlund Administration Building
601 E. John St.
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217-333-1300
romano3@illinois.edu

Responsible for administration of the Student Affairs units, including Assembly Hall, Campus Recreation, Career Center, Counseling Center, Office of the Dean of Students, Illini Union, McKinley Health Center, Minority Student Affairs, Student Conflict Resolution, and University Housing and Dining Services. Focus is on the student experience and connections to society.
Dear Parents,

I want to take this opportunity to relay to you some recent accomplishments that I believe reflect the outstanding character and caliber of this great land-grant university.

First, the 2009 MacArthur Fellows, or the “genius awards” as they are often called, were announced in September. I am happy to report that the Urbana campus has added our sixth MacArthur Fellow, John Rogers.

John is the Lee J. Flory-Founder Chair Professor of Engineering, and also is affiliated with the Beckman Institute and the Materials Research Laboratory, as well as the departments of electrical and computer engineering, of mechanical science and engineering, and of chemistry.

The MacArthur committee said John’s work is “building the foundation for a revolution in manufacture of industrial, consumer and biocompatible electronics.”

Also, last month, professor Gene Robinson, a renowned honey-bee researcher, received the National Institutes of Health’s Pioneer Award. The awards program supports pioneering research on major biomedical and behavioral challenges. He plans to use the award to study the brain’s reward system in the hope of better understanding drug addiction and other diseases.

Gene previously led a team of scientists who mapped the genetic code of the honey bee. He has been honored as a University Scholar, Fulbright Fellow and Guggenheim Fellow. He recently was elected to the National Academy of Sciences.

I remember helping to hire John Rogers and helping to retain Gene Robinson so I am especially delighted by these honors.

Also making the news is another past MacArthur Fellow and National Book Award winner, Richard Powers. His ninth novel, “Generosity,” was just published and already received rave reviews, including a starred review in Publisher’s Weekly. Rick is an Illinois alumnus and a professor in the department of English. He is a full-time member of the Beckman Institute Cognitive Neuroscience group. The New Yorker said of Rick’s work: “Contemporary American novelists, compared with Powers, can seem like intellectual visitors, fiddling in the foyers of the mind.”

High praise indeed.

Speaking of books, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library has acquired its 11-millionth volume, Benjamin Franklin’s edition of M.T. Cicero’s “Cato Major,” or his “Discourse of Old-Age” – the first English translation of Classical literature printed in the new world.

The Rare Book and Manuscript Library hosted “The Classics in America: A Symposium in Celebration of the Acquisition of the 11-millionth Book in the Collection of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.”

Currently, every millionth volume is on display in The Rare Book and Manuscript Library in the exhibit “One in a Million: An Exhibition of Eleven Landmark Acquisitions at the University of Illinois.”

Finally, on the first weekend in October, our great Alumni Association encouraged alumni around the world through the program iHelp to serve in their communities in the name of Illinois. As they do so often, our students really stepped up during iHelp volunteer days from reading to youngsters after school to donating blood, babysitting, bringing cookies to local police and firefighters, or helping out a neighbor.

As you can tell it’s been a busy but successful fall at Illinois. And we’re just getting started!