


An Evening With UIC
Category 14 – Best Program in Donor Recognition/Stewardship
University of Illinois at Chicago and University of Illinois Foundation
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▪ **General description of the entry**

An Evening With UIC is the University of Illinois at Chicago's annual premier donor recognition and stewardship event. It's an opportunity to invite our closest friends and alumni to campus to honor donors, while sharing the profound impact giving has at UIC. Held April 4th, 2009, it was the sixth event of its kind.


Since the June, 2007 launch of our \$650 million Brilliant Futures Campaign we've posed the question, "What happens when you give someone a chance," and answered with a succinct message about the impact of giving. We supported the event's objectives through each stage of planning and execution by addressing this key theme.



Invited guests received first word of An Evening With UIC in early February, when we launched a strategic integrated communications program, which combined mail, email and Web. We created our communications strategy with a sharp donor focus, and found ways to engage the audience in unique ways. One of the communications components supporting this was an interactive component of our event Web site, which asked invitees to share their stories of chances. Another was the great care taken to highlight the honored donors who would be presenting at the event, weaving into our collateral and speaking program the stories of the chances they gave. In addition, we asked leadership to tell stories of chances they'd been given, which gave our important audience further personal insight into our Foundation president and UIC chancellor.

Not only was our event Web site a valuable information resource, but it was also an interactive tool through which invitees, whether attending or not, engaged in the conversation about what happens when you give someone a chance. Understanding not everyone could attend this special night, we wanted to make all feel as though they were involved. The site's built-in form allowed visitors to submit stories of chances they'd given, or been given, while at UIC. Select stories were shared with our entire audience at the event.

The invitation and Web site gave a glimpse of our honored donors' stories. They included three immigrants who were given a chance for a quality education at UIC, and created scholarships to give back. And, a doctor who honored his late pharmacist wife by funding a beautiful and functional medicinal garden on UIC's campus, to serve as a relaxing oasis and plant source for pharmacognosy research. Our printed event program shared a little more of the stories, including a hint of the incredible impact each gift had on the beneficiary who would speak with each donor.



Our program began when, from their seats throughout the room, four exemplary UIC students, who themselves had benefitted from private giving, read aloud the

stories selected from those submitted on the Web. Many of the stories read were those of guests in attendance, who were touched to play a part in answering what happens when you give someone a chance. After remarks, and personal stories of chances from UIC's chancellor and the University of Illinois Foundation president, the program's highlight began.

This time was dedicated entirely to honoring a selection of outstanding donors and celebrating the profound impact of their gifts. Each of the four featured donors was selected months in advance by a cross-campus committee of development professionals who were charged with considering, and choosing from, dozens of nominations. During this portion, the chancellor provided personal biographical information on each donor-beneficiary pair before the beneficiary formally introduced the donor. The beneficiaries' stories, often stirring and emotional, brought to life the amazing power of a single gift. In response, each donor shared with the audience, in his own words, the full story of why UIC is important to him, what compelled him to give back and the feeling of gratification provided from giving. It was a powerful, touching and effective presentation.

With an incredibly successful event behind us, all program participants received a personal thank you letter from the chancellor. In addition, we acknowledged the honored donors who spoke with personalized photo albums.

▪ **Goals and objectives of the project**

An Evening With UIC is a donor-centered stewardship event, through which we intend to:

- Recognize and honor the support UIC has received from its closest donors, alumni and friends.
- Steward relationships with current donors and prospects.
- Provide an opportunity to bring donors and friends back to campus.
- Exhibit the profound impact of giving and demonstrate specifically what gifts to UIC have accomplished.
- Display to loyal supporters and new friends what makes UIC a world-class institution.

▪ **Description of how project fits into overall institutional and/or advancement goals**

We are an institution which, since its beginning, offers broad access to quality education to those who might not otherwise afford it. This mission works hand in hand with our Brilliant Futures Campaign, which aims to bring the supporters who share our vision together with the faculty, researchers, students and leadership of our university.

An Evening With UIC serves as a reflection of, and a unique platform to, demonstrate this mission and our campaign priorities in action. It brings to life the importance of access to education and the meaning of giving someone a chance.

▪ **Audience**

The audience is a cross section of top major donors and prospects, as determined by each of UIC’s colleges and units.

- We mailed 1,895 invitations. The event was attended by 397 people, a 66 percent increase over last year’s attendance.
- In addition to invited guests, An Evening With UIC is co-hosted by UIC’s chancellor and the University of Illinois Foundation president. The University of Illinois president and UIC’s college deans and unit heads also attend.

▪ **Total number of professional and support staff who worked on the program**

UIC Staff	
Donor Nomination Committee:	9
Office of Development Event Planning:	6
Office of Development Event Staffing (in addition to above):	8
Student Volunteers	9
Student and Professional Musicians:	9
UIC Forum Staff:	8
UIC Parking:	2
UIC Police:	2
Total:	53

Outside Agencies and Freelancers Used:	9
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▪ **Program budget and unit costs**

Catering:	\$59,968.42
Décor:	\$21,283.68
Collateral: invitation and program design and printing	\$21,214.00
Entertainment:	\$4,600.00
Space Rental: UIC Forum (including A/V costs)	\$3,976.00
Video Production:	\$1,550.00
Photographer:	\$905.00
Speaking Coach:	\$900.00
Awards:	\$511.20
Coat Check:	\$510.00
Total:	\$115,418.30

▪ **Any special circumstances or challenges faced**

- How to create and maintain interest in an annual event:
We reached our audience early with a strategic promotional plan that shared a new look and feel and new messages for the event. Involving invitees in sharing stories of chances gave them ownership in the event’s program. Also, this event was a unique opportunity for these important guests to meet our new chancellor.
- How to coordinate efforts of 17 colleges and units in preparing for the event:
Concurrently with external communications, we sustained an aggressive internal communications plan. Weekly, we updated all involved parties on event status, current tasks and upcoming due dates. Those development staff members whose donors were being honored received additional communications, with updates, tasks and deadlines pertaining to them.

- How to prepare donors and beneficiaries for public speaking:
Our communications team began working closely with honorees and beneficiaries shortly after they were nominated. We assisted them in drafting scripts, which tell their stories in their own words. Each is also offered the services of a professional speaking coach, who trains them to deliver their remarks personally and effectively. Lastly, a rehearsal prior to the event elevates each speaker’s comfort level before the show goes on.
 - How to prepare a new chancellor for her first major donor event after fewer than four months on the job:
We gave the same careful, strategic planning to prepare our chancellor as we did our staff. Through brief, efficient meetings we educated her on the history of the event and her role in it, as well as worked closely with her on drafting remarks. During the event itself, staff ensured she met and engaged with many attendees.
 - How to transform a multi-purpose conference space for an intimate dinner:
A collaborative team of UIC special events and Forum staff and event designers piped and draped, strategically placed lighting and candles and arranged a stunning table décor and an impressive and inviting stage presence. Each element worked together to attract the eye toward our intended focal points, making the space intimate, comfortable and warm. The planned décor inspired the look and feel of all physical communications pieces preceding, during and following the event.
- **Documented results, measurements of effectiveness**
Our strategic marketing and focused messaging resulted in a 100% increase in the number of non faculty/staff supporters in attendance over the previous year. In addition to outstanding turnout, the testimony of our development staff proves the success of An Evening With UIC:
 - Chuck Coughlin, Associate Dean for Advancement, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences: “Without a doubt, the event does an outstanding job of stewarding relationships. It shows the impact of their dollars, and demonstrates we’re following through on their intent. On this evening, we added a member to our board of visitors, engaged a prominent prospect and moved a donor toward writing a gift agreement.”
 - Ross Crampton, Director of Advancement, College of Architecture & The Arts: “I was in discussions with a prospect about a major gift who was taken aback after An Evening With UIC. We closed the gift right after the event. The night shows off the impact of giving and gets people juiced about what can be done through philanthropy. UIC proved it’s prepared to make more brilliant futures happen.”
 - Luigi Amendola, Director of Development, College of Dentistry: “A neighboring dental school closed leaving many dentists without a place to belong. An Evening With UIC was a great opportunity to showcase UIC as we build relationships with them. One of those dentists, who’d recently made a gift, attended the event and left feeling thrilled about his involvement in and support of our college.”