



ILLINOIS



CICEP

INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY UNIVERSITIES
AWARDS PROGRAM

CASE
STUDY
2014

ThinkChicago

The University of Illinois (U of I) attracts the best and brightest students from all corners of the globe who wish to advance their educational careers at the Urbana-Champaign, Chicago, and Springfield campuses. While the number of students applying to the University increases each year, U of I is challenged by the “brain drain” phenomenon as many college graduates flock to the coasts. By aligning the University’s research priorities with the needs of industry and allocating resources to compel recent graduates to stay in the Midwest, we believe we can grow the regional economy and stem the outflow of talent leaving our borders. As the state’s only land-grant institution, the University of Illinois has an obligation, enshrined in our motto of “Learning and Labor,” to serve the state of Illinois by developing a workforce pipeline for the next generation of companies and jobs.

There is no shortage of skilled graduates coming out of the University of Illinois. The U of I has a higher percentage of STEM graduates than all other public 4-year institutions, and there are more than 9,000 engineering undergraduate students enrolled across all campuses each year, more than the nation’s top four engineering schools combined. For those wanting to start their own companies, there are plenty of entrepreneurial resources available, including the University’s business incubators, [EnterpriseWorks](#) and [EnterpriseWorks Chicago](#); Chicago’s digital technology hub, [1871](#); [Chicago Innovation Mentors](#); and a robust network of U of I alumni. Students must be informed and understand how they can leverage these opportunities and resources.

THINKCHICAGO

The University has defined a strategic initiative to retain talent in the Midwest by creating high-tech opportunities for young graduates and connecting students and young alumni with these opportunities. [ThinkChicago](#) is an example of how we are partnering with industry, government, and not-for-profit organizations to develop unique opportunities to promote Chicago as a nexus for innovation and technology and an attractive place to live, work, and play.

ThinkChicago is a partnership between the University of Illinois, the City of Chicago, [World Business Chicago](#), [Chicago Ideas Week](#), and [1871](#) aimed at capitalizing on these strengths and attracting young, talented leaders to Chicago and the Midwest to showcase the professional and social opportunities that exist. Attendees of the ThinkChicago program—selected through a competitive application process—have the chance to visit the business headquarters of some of Chicago’s most innovative tech companies, meet industry leaders, attend an exclusive career fair with Chicago-based businesses, and gain free admission to major cultural events and attractions.

THINKCHICAGO: LOLLAPALOOZA

Chicago is a hub of tech innovation where young entrepreneurs grow big ideas, transform industries, and shape technology and business as we know it. But beyond the professional opportunities lies a city full of vibrant, trendy, and modern cultural and social amenities. Millennials, the generation that was raised on technology and forms the future of the workforce, live by the motto “work hard, play hard.” Chicago offers the professional and social lifestyle that these young engineers, technologists, and entrepreneurs are seeking.

ThinkChicago programs generally coincide with other major events, such as Chicago Ideas Week and the [Lollapalooza](#) music festival. Earlier this month, the University of Illinois co-hosted *ThinkChicago: Lollapalooza*. Participants toured Chicago's most dynamic companies like Groupon and Orbitz, attended a company showcase designed exclusively for them, and experienced exciting panel discussions featuring major tech leaders, including 1871 CEO Howard Tullman and former CTO for Obama for America, Harper Reid. Students also received passes to Lollapalooza, one of the country's biggest and most exciting music festivals, which included a backstage tour and Q&A session with the show's organizers. In just three days, the University was able to give students an exclusive, behind-the-scenes view at the city's tech industry.

Of the 125 participants, approximately 25% of them hailed from the University of Illinois' Urbana-Champaign and Chicago campuses. By partnering with LinkedIn, we received a record number 1,032 applications from 36 universities, including all of the top undergraduate and graduate engineering schools, and spanning 34 states and 12 countries. Applicants were selected on academic excellence and proven commitment to technology and innovation.

THINKCHICAGO: CHICAGO IDEAS WEEK

The University of Illinois is the exclusive academic sponsor of Chicago Ideas Week, a premiere annual gathering of global thought leaders created to provoke new ideas and inspire actionable results. Similarly to *ThinkChicago: Lollapalooza*, the mission of *ThinkChicago: Chicago Ideas Week* is to present 150 of the nation's most outstanding college students with a close-up view of Chicago's growing tech scene, connect them with business leaders, and promote creativity and innovation. In addition to ThinkChicago programming, participants will receive free admission to certain Chicago Ideas Week events and talks. Last year's speakers included U of I alumni Max Levchin (Co-Founder and CTO of PayPal) and Ping Fu (Chief Strategy Officer of 3D Systems).



Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel welcomes students to ThinkChicago: Lollapalooza 2014.



Students receive a behind-the-scenes view of Lollapalooza.



Jed Taylor, University of Illinois, and Max Levchin, Co-Founder of PayPal and University of Illinois alum, speak to ThinkChicago participants during Chicago Ideas Week 2013.

CONCLUSION

By creating attractive opportunities and incentives for University of Illinois graduates to remain in Illinois, the University will continue to fuel the economic ecosystem with outstanding talent while driving economic growth for the state of Illinois and beyond. ThinkChicago is just one example of how we can grow the workforce by developing talent and connecting this young talent with attractive, lucrative opportunities. In addition to showcasing Chicago's vibrant tech industry and lifestyle, ThinkChicago is a fantastic opportunity for the University to promote its top faculty, students, and alumni, resulting in further collaboration on innovation and economic engagement initiatives and activities. Having hosted multiple ThinkChicago events over the last three years, we also are building a robust network of ThinkChicago alumni, many of whom have found employment opportunities and chosen to relocate to Chicago upon graduation because of this program. In doing so, they are becoming the best ambassadors for the city while serving as advocates for economic growth in the region.