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Fall 2025 Report

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A Letter from the Executive Director



As we close out the fall at the Institute of Politics, we're reflecting on the importance of this moment in our national politics. Our students are facing a complex political climate, and it is our responsibility to equip them with the critical thinking skills, intellectual curiosity and hands-on experience they need to navigate it. This quarter, we bid farewell to Heidi Heitkamp and welcomed John Kirby as our new director. Through it all, I'm grateful for the continuity of strong leadership and the steady focus it brings to our mission.

This year, we introduced Local Motion, an initiative to help students understand the power of local action. Through hometown internships, community service projects across Chicago and conversations with practitioners such as former Representative Mary Peltola, students are seeing how listening, showing up and working with others can move communities forward.

We also challenged students to envision the impact they could make in their own neighborhoods through our Fall 2025 Policy Challenge. Students were tasked with proposing solutions to healthcare issues in Chicago, Illinois or Cook County. Twenty teams competed, the most in the program's history.

As always, our public events brought a wide range of viewpoints to campus, giving students the chance to engage directly on issues including immigration in Chicago, Israel and Gaza, LGBTQ+ rights and divisions within the conservative movement.

Thank you for your support of this work and of our students. I'm looking forward to what we will build in the months ahead with John's leadership and with the commitment our students bring to public service every day.

Sincerely,
Zeenat Rahman



Scenes from the IOP's 2025 Fall Programming



The 2025-26 Student Advisory Board outside the IOP House



Executive Summary

The Institute of Politics (IOP) empowers University of Chicago students to engage meaningfully in politics and public service. Through nonpartisan, extracurricular programming, the IOP inspires civic participation at the local, state and national levels and serves as a cornerstone of the University's commitment to free expression and open inquiry.

This fall, the IOP launched Local Motion, a new initiative designed to counter growing polarization by rooting students in the power of local government, local communities and in-person connection. The program encourages students to explore local opportunities—through volunteering, internships and dialogue—that strengthen civic life and foster collaboration across differences.

Local Motion is built around three core actions: listen, share and act. These values are expressed through programming across the IOP's four program areas.

- **Career Development** provides more than 300 paid internships annually in politics and public service. This year, in addition to D.C. and Chicago internships, our focus was on our hometown internship program, which provides fully-funded summer internships in students' hometowns, enabling them to give back to their local communities.
- **Civic Engagement** deepens students' participation in public life through leadership development groups and community service projects. Throughout the fall, students developed their skills in civil discourse, engaged in volunteer work and participated in experiential learning programs focused on housing policy, immigration and the broader challenges facing Chicago.
- **The Pritzker Fellows Program** connects students with distinguished practitioners in politics, government, journalism and advocacy. Fellows provide invaluable insights and mentorship through small-group discussions and office hours. This quarter, we had a mix of political and ideological perspectives that challenged our students to think rigorously about their own values and beliefs. One of our Visiting Fellows, former U.S. Representative Mary Peltola, shared lessons from her journey from tribal governance to Congress, highlighting the power of local action in driving national change.
- **Our Speaker Series** reflects UChicago's commitment to free expression, bringing voices from across the political spectrum to campus and creating space for open, in-person debate on the most pressing issues of the day. The Speaker Series also runs our policy challenge program, which this fall tasked students with developing local solutions to healthcare issues in Chicago, Illinois or Cook County.

Local Motion does not steer students away from national or global issues—it prepares them to engage with those issues more thoughtfully. This fall's Speaker Series and Pritzker Fellows seminars featured dynamic discussions on Israel and Gaza, immigration enforcement in Chicago, LGBTQ+ rights and divisions within the MAGA movement, underscoring the IOP's role as a space for honest, informed and respectful dialogue.

In the pages that follow, the Institute of Politics is thrilled to share some of the highlights from our busy fall. We are deeply grateful to the University of Chicago, our Board of Advisors, philanthropic and community partners and—most of all—our students, whose energy, curiosity and commitment to public service inspire everything we do.

Students get to know former Ambassador David Pressman at Meet the Fellows





Former Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau (right) in conversation with IOP Executive Director Zeenat Rahman (left)

Speaker Series

After a turbulent summer in Washington and across the nation's cities, the Institute of Politics opened the Fall Quarter with more than a dozen thoughtful public discussions designed to help students contextualize current events and deepen their understanding of today's political landscape.

Rooted in the University of Chicago's commitment to free expression and open debate, the IOP's Speaker Series continues to serve as a cornerstone of civil discourse on campus, fostering conversations on the most pressing issues of our time.

More than 1,000 attendees participated in panels and debates covering topics such as the Supreme Court's shadow docket, China's growing tech sector dominance, the deployment of the National Guard in blue cities, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and Americans' shifting views on Israel.

One of the quarter's highlights was the **Clash of the Conservatives**, a Counterpoint debate featuring two prominent right-wing writers exploring the deepening divides within American conservatism. While conservative students found the discussion particularly relevant, many liberal students also welcomed the opportunity to step outside their ideological comfort zones to better understand the internal dynamics shaping the Trump administration.

The IOP welcomed an impressive lineup of individual speakers, including former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Senator Tammy Duckworth, Congresswoman Sarah McBride and Senator Lisa Murkowski. Each engaged students in dialogue about the post-2024 world order and the challenges of governing within an increasingly dysfunctional political system.



Moments from the IOP's Fall 2025 Speaker Series

HOUSING ASSISTANCE COUNCIL



Career Development

Second-year Bez Kubsa at her IOP Summer 2025 Internship with the Housing Assistance Council in D.C.

This summer, IOP students worked with 165 internship employer partners across the country and abroad. More than 80 students remained in Chicago, interning downtown and in Hyde Park, while 63 students spent the summer in Washington, D.C. Through the Hometown Internship Program, students returned to their communities—from Americus, Georgia, to Frederick, South Dakota—to work in local nonprofits and government agencies.

Looking ahead to the 2025–26 academic year, the IOP will support 37 internships in and around Chicago, partnering with organizations such as the Chicago Mayor’s Office, the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, the Chicago Housing Authority and World Business Chicago. With the city at the forefront of national debates on immigration enforcement, public safety and housing insecurity, these placements allow students to confront complex issues through hands-on experience and contribute to local solutions.

165

Internship employer
partners this summer

80+

Students stayed in
Chicago for the summer

63

Students interned in
Washington, D.C.

37

2025-26 academic-year
internships in Chicago



Born and raised in rural South Dakota, second-year **Sofia Losure** participated in the IOP's Hometown Internship Program this summer, working for **PorchLight**, a South Dakota-based company specializing in economic development and housing studies for rural communities.



Student Spotlight: Sofia Losure, AB '28

"Whenever I ran into a big problem with my work, I found that just going into town and asking someone in the community about it helped me figure out a solution," Sofia said. "Most people really care about where they live, and they want to help."

In the first part of her internship, Sofia and her team visited several towns to conduct visual inspections of local housing conditions and interview residents and workers.

After learning how PorchLight structures its research, Sofia began leading her own housing study in her hometown of Frederick, South Dakota. "I reach out to my boss when I need help or guidance, but the housing study is fully mine," she explained. "I've done every part of it—from collecting information to building the study in Visual Studio Code and Datawrapper."

Frederick, with a population of just 216, presented unique challenges. "When I was looking at the census data, I could tell the population numbers were wrong. I've lived in this town my whole life, and I knew that data wasn't right," she said. Sofia raised the issue with the mayor, and together they conducted their own local census to ensure her data was accurate.

"I knew I wanted to come home for the summer, so the Hometown Internship Program at the IOP fit me perfectly," Sofia said. "I wanted to help my community, and I knew we needed a new housing study. To receive more funding from the Housing Opportunity Fund, a town needs an updated housing study within the past three years—and Frederick's was out of date."

Through her internship, Sofia gained a deeper appreciation for her community. "I feel like I have a new connection with the town," she reflected. "I wouldn't normally go up to the city's banker and say, 'Hey, how do you think Frederick is doing?' so it's been really special to connect with people that way."





Fall 2025 Practitioners in Residence, Nubia Willman (left) and Mike Ricci (right)

Career Mentorship

Throughout the Fall Quarter, the IOP's Career Development team and student interns hosted a series of career workshops and one-on-one advising sessions to help students apply for internships and strengthen their resumes, cover letters and networking skills.

This year, Career Development also welcomed a new cohort of **Practitioners in Residence**, mid-career political professionals who serve as career mentors for our students. Mike Ricci and Nubia Willman engaged students interested in politics and public service, emphasizing opportunities at the local and state level.

Mike Ricci brought more than two decades of communications experience at both the state and federal levels, having served as Director of Communications for former Speaker Paul Ryan, former Maryland Governor Larry Hogan and former Speaker John Boehner. Nubia Willman, former Deputy Chief of Staff and Director of the Office of New Americans for former Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, is a community-driven leader and seasoned attorney.

Together, Nubia and Mike modeled distinct but equally rewarding paths in public service, spanning political communications, lobbying, advising a big city mayor and operating an NGO.

Summer 2025 Internships

Elected & Political Office

- City of Chicago, Office of the Mayor, Office of Community Safety
- City of Chicago, Office of the Mayor, Chief Homelessness Officer
- City of Chicago, Treasurer's Office
- Los Angeles County, District Attorney's Office
- Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD)
- Office of Cook County Commissioner Jessica Vásquez, District 8
- Office of Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker, Office of Equity
- Office of Illinois State Sen. Robert Peters
- Office of Maryland State Sen. Shaneka Henson
- Office of Massachusetts State Rep. John Moran
- Office of U.S. Rep. Laura Gillen (NY-04)
- Office of U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur (OH-09)
- Office of U.S. Rep. Nicholas J. Begich (AK-AL)
- Office of U.S. Rep. Nikki Budzinski (IL-13)
- Office of U.S. Rep. Norma J. Torres (CA-35), Ontario, District Office
- Office of U.S. Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi (IL-08)
- Office of U.S. Rep. Vicente Gonzalez Jr. (TX-34)
- Office of U.S. Sen. Andy Kim (D-NJ)
- Office of U.S. Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY)
- Office of U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL)
- Office of U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Chicago, District Office
- The White House, Executive Office of the President, Office of the Vice President

Government Agencies

- Chicago Public Schools, CEO's Office, Board Liaison
- City of Chicago, Office of the Mayor, Chief Homelessness Officer
- City of San Antonio
- City of North Vernon
- Cook County Department of Research, Operations and Innovation
- District of Columbia, Office of Police Complaints
- Georgia Public Defender Council
- Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Office of Broadband
- Illinois Department of Labor
- Illinois Finance Authority
- New York City Emergency Management
- Sumter County Schools
- Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles
- U.S. Department of Commerce
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer
- U.S. Department of the Treasury, Departmental Offices
- White House Council of Economic Advisors

Government Affairs

- CSX Transportation
- Ferox Strategies
- Grove Climate Group
- K.O. Strategies
- Merton Capital Partners
- Office of Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker, Federal Affairs Office
- Public Strategies Washington
- Tiger Hill Partners

Media Organizations

- ABC News
- Aspen Institute, Religion & Society Program
- High School Law Review
- More Perfect Union
- New York Focus
- The Cook Political Report with Amy Walter
- The Dispatch
- WBEZ

Intergovernmental/ Nongovernmental Agency

- Human Rights Watch
- Illinois Justice Project
- United Nations Development Programme, Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) Unit

Political Consulting, Strategy & Polling

- Blue Ravens Campaigns
- Dabson DaVanzo & Associates, LLC
- Federal Hall Policy Advisors, LLC
- Ignite Blue Partners
- Magnify Strategies
- NEJ Consulting, LLC
- New Heights Communications
- PorchLight
- Precision Strategies
- Public Opinion Strategies, LLC
- Seven Letter
- The Frost Group
- Trilogy Interactive

Nonprofit/Advocacy

- A Better Chicago
- Advance Illinois
- American Farmland Trust
- American Society of Anesthesiologists
- Appalachian Bear Rescue
- Arab American Institute
- Art Works Project
- Asian Americans Advancing Justice
- Ballotpedia
- Catholic Charities, Legal Services
- Center on Halsted
- Civic Federation
- Coastal States Organization
- Commercial Club and Civic Committee of Chicago
- Community Organizing and Family Issues
- Congressional Management Foundation
- Conservation X Labs
- Coppin Community Center
- Current Innovation, NFP
- Delta Health Alliance
- Depression and Anxiety Specialty Clinic of Chicago
- Disability Lead
- Edgar Fellows
- Federal Defenders of New York
- FirstRepair
- Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont
- Haitian Education Initiatives
- Haymarket House
- Hazleton Integration Project
- Healthy Schools Campaign
- HEART To Grow
- Housing Assistance Council
- Illinois Policy Institute
- Innovations for Poverty Action
- Institute for Justice Clinic
- International Center for Religion and Diplomacy
- International Student Aid Organization
- John Howard Association

- Justice with Children
- Last Mile Education Fund
- Legal Services Corporation
- Lilette Advisors
- NAMI Chicago
- National Association of Hispanic Journalists
- National Public Housing Museum
- Orleans Public Defenders
- Partnerships for College Completion
- Pilsen Environmental Rights and Reform Organization
- Policing Project at NYU School of Law
- Queens Community House, Immigration Services Department
- Results for America
- SAFE (Securing America's Future Energy)
- Seed St. Louis
- Start Early
- The Aspen Institute, Community Strategies Group
- The Carter Center
- The Leadership 3O
- University of Chicago, Institute of Politics, Bridge Program
- University of Chicago, Institute of Politics, Career Development
- University of Chicago, Institute of Politics, Civic Engagement
- University of Chicago, Institute of Politics, Communications Team
- University of Chicago, Institute of Politics, Pritzker Fellows Program
- University of Chicago, Institute of Politics, Speaker Series
- University of Chicago Law School, Abrams Environmental Law Clinic
- University of Chicago Law School, Federal Criminal Justice Clinic
- World Business Chicago
- Young Invincibles

Research

- Chicago Project on Security and Threats
- Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Centre for International Agricultural Research Office
- Corioli Institute
- Energy & Environment Lab
- Exalt Data
- Fraym
- Milgrom Social Justice Institute, Inclusive Economy Lab
- Public Opinion Strategies, LLC

Think Tank

- Asia Society
- Atlantic Council
- Bipartisan Policy Center
- Bitcoin Policy Institute
- Data, Policy, and Innovation Center
- EIG Partners, Office of Flavio Valle
- Hudson Institute
- Illinois Policy Institute
- Institute for National Security Studies
- Stimson Center, South Asia Program
- The Brookings Institution
- The German Marshall Fund of the United States
- The Hoover Institution

2025-26 Academic-Year Internships

Government

- Chicago Housing Authority
- Chicago Public Library
- Chicago Public Schools, Chief Executive Office, Board of Education Liaison
- City of Chicago, Alderman Anthony Quezada, Ward 35
- City of Chicago, Department of Family and Support Services
- City of Chicago, Office of the Mayor, Chief Homelessness Officer
- Cook County, Office of Commissioner Jessica Vásquez, 8th District
- Cook County Department of Research, Operations, and Innovation
- Illinois Department of Human Services
- Illinois Department of Labor
- Illinois Finance Authority, Climate Bank
- Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Office of Broadband
- Office of Illinois State Sen. Robert Peters
- Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, Commissioner Eira Corral Sepúlveda
- Office of Illinois State Rep. Kam Buckner
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Energy and Environment Lab

Nongovernment

- Advance Illinois
- American Farmland Trust
- Asian Americans Advancing Justice
- Blue Raven
- Center for Tax and Budget Accountability
- Chicago Votes
- Civic Federation
- Commercial Club and Civic Committee of Chicago
- Coppin Community Center, La Tiendita
- Cor Strategies
- Disability Lead
- Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
- Illinois Justice Project
- Illinois Policy Institute
- University of Chicago, Institute of Politics
- Reform for Illinois
- Southside Together Organizing for Power
- The John Howard Association
- Third Reading Consulting Group
- WBEZ
- World Business Chicago



Pritzker Fellows

Vince Warren, Fall 2025 Pritzker Fellow, leading a students-only seminar

This Fall Quarter, the IOP's Pritzker Fellows Program explored the intersections of national security, constitutional rights and foreign policy, as well as the inherent tensions that exist between these critical areas.

As President Trump made bold executive moves to shift the culture and scope of the Armed Forces, Alex Wagner, formerly of the Air Force, brought leading generals and defense experts to campus to help students analyze the impact of these changes in real time. Dan Caldwell, a long-time leader in the conservative isolationist movement, decoded the various factions on foreign policy within the Republican Party.

Vince Warren, the executive director of the Center for Constitutional Rights, guided students through the role of the law in organizing and activism, applying his deep knowledge of constitutional law to examine the administration's unprecedented policy agenda. David Pressman, former U.S. Ambassador to Hungary and member of the United Nations Security Council, used Hungary as a case study for understanding the rise of authoritarian movements around the world.

IOP alum Dr. Yangyang Cheng helped students understand the most consequential bilateral relationship in the world today – the U.S. and China – while former Congresswoman Mary Peltola of Alaska emphasized the value of local public service through the lens of a Native Alaskan politician.

Fall 2025 Pritzker Fellows



Dan Caldwell

Former Senior Advisor to the U.S. Secretary of Defense

Caldwell discussed how the rise of the MAGA movement shattered the bipartisan foreign policy consensus, diving into the roles that American overreach in the Middle East and the rise of China have played in this shift.



Yangyang Cheng

Research Scholar in Law and Fellow at Yale Law School's Paul Tsai China Center

Cheng, an IOP alum and expert on science, technology and U.S.-China relations, returned to campus to explore the rising tensions between scientific development and a renewed emphasis on techno-nationalism. Along with students, she explored whether scientific development can transcend political borders.



Mary Peltola

Former U.S. Representative from Alaska

Mary Peltola, the first Alaska Native elected to Congress, offered students a powerful perspective on public service, tracing her path from her work on her Native Council's tribal court and the Inter-Tribal Fish Commission to her time in city council and eventually the U.S. House of Representatives.



David Pressman

Former U.S. Ambassador to Hungary

Bringing his expertise as an ambassador, attorney and strategist, Pressman explored what American diplomacy looks like in the face of democratic collapse and authoritarianism.



Alex Wagner

Former Assistant Secretary of the Air Force

Wagner gave students an inside look into the Pentagon, where law, policy, politics and technology intersect. In his seminars, students probed the efficacy of civilian control of the military.



Vince Warren

Executive Director, Center for Constitutional Rights

Warren, a leading expert on racial injustice and discriminatory policing, unpacked the political and legal questions surrounding the Trump administration's unprecedented policy agenda.



Modeling Civil Discourse

Every quarter, we challenge all our fellows to invite a guest with whom they passionately disagree to at least one of their seminars. Alex Wagner, one of the highest-ranking openly gay officials at the Pentagon during the Biden administration and a leading advocate for inclusion in the military, invited Dan Caldwell, former senior advisor to Pete Hegseth, to discuss the Trump administration's dismantling of diversity initiatives and ban on transgender service members. Throughout their seminar, the two modeled thoughtful and respectful dialogue on this deeply personal and often divisive issue, demonstrating the value of civil discourse even amid profound disagreement.



Yangyang Cheng, IOP alum and 2025 Fall Pritzker Fellow, outside the IOP House with fourth-year Sadie Darbro

From Physics to Politics

Yangyang Cheng credits the University of Chicago—and the Institute of Politics in particular—with giving her “the education of a lifetime.”

“The IOP was an integral part of my UChicago education,” she reflected. “Coming from China and from an authoritarian political system, I had never interacted with people in positions of power. The IOP demystified U.S. politics for me. I realized I could learn from people in power, disagree with them and simply talk with them as fellow human beings.”

Yangyang attended some of the very first IOP events after the Institute opened its doors. At the time, she recalls, the IOP was still finding its identity, often focusing on campaign strategists and electoral politics. But Yangyang and a group of peers saw an opportunity to broaden that focus. With institutional support from the IOP, they launched the **International Policy Program (IPP)**—a student-led initiative to explore global affairs and provide a space for thoughtful discussion.

“The first event we organized as the IPP was about the Charlie Hebdo shooting,” she said. “That tragedy raised urgent questions about freedom of expression, national security and identity that are deeply relevant to a university campus.”

Ten years later, returning to the IOP felt like a homecoming. “I’m so heartened that the IPP didn’t end with our graduation. Talking with current students, I’m encouraged by how curious and conscientious they are. They’re not solely career-driven—they’re thinking about how to use their education to do good in society.”

That legacy continues through current IPP student leaders. **Sadie Darbro**, AB ‘26, one of the program’s co-chairs, shared, “The International Policy Program has provided me with unique opportunities to engage with international policy topics. Meeting Yangyang was a wonderful chance to learn from her experience and see how the IPP shaped her career. It’s a privilege to lead the program today and to help bring new voices and perspectives to the IOP.”

Her co-chair, **Doan Tran**, AB ‘27, echoed that sentiment: “One of my favorite experiences at UChicago has been my involvement with the IPP. The program allows students to be active participants in conversations about critical global issues. Meeting Yangyang and hearing about her journey from physics to politics was incredibly inspiring—especially for someone like me who hopes to pursue a career in foreign service and policy.”

From its founding to today, the International Policy Program continues to embody the IOP’s mission of empowering students to explore ideas, challenge their preconceptions and connect their education to the wider world.



If you want to get something done, do it locally.

Mary Peltola, former U.S. Representative from Alaska, engaging with students about local politics

"My message to students at the IOP was simple: if you want to get something done, do it locally.

I first ran for office for the most prosaic reason: my three-year-old son gazed out at a construction site and said he longed for a swimming pool. I ran solely to get it done, and to this day, it is the accomplishment I am most proud of. After serving 10 years in the State House, I served on my local city council. Local public service allowed me to positively affect my community's quality of life—immediately—and it's been some of the most rewarding and important work I've done.

I was pleasantly surprised to learn that all seminars take place around a table in the IOP's living room, allowing for the forging of real connections. There is such positive energy coming from this student body, and it gives me a lot of hope—not only for the short term, but especially the long-term future of our country."

Mary Peltola, former U.S. Representative from Alaska



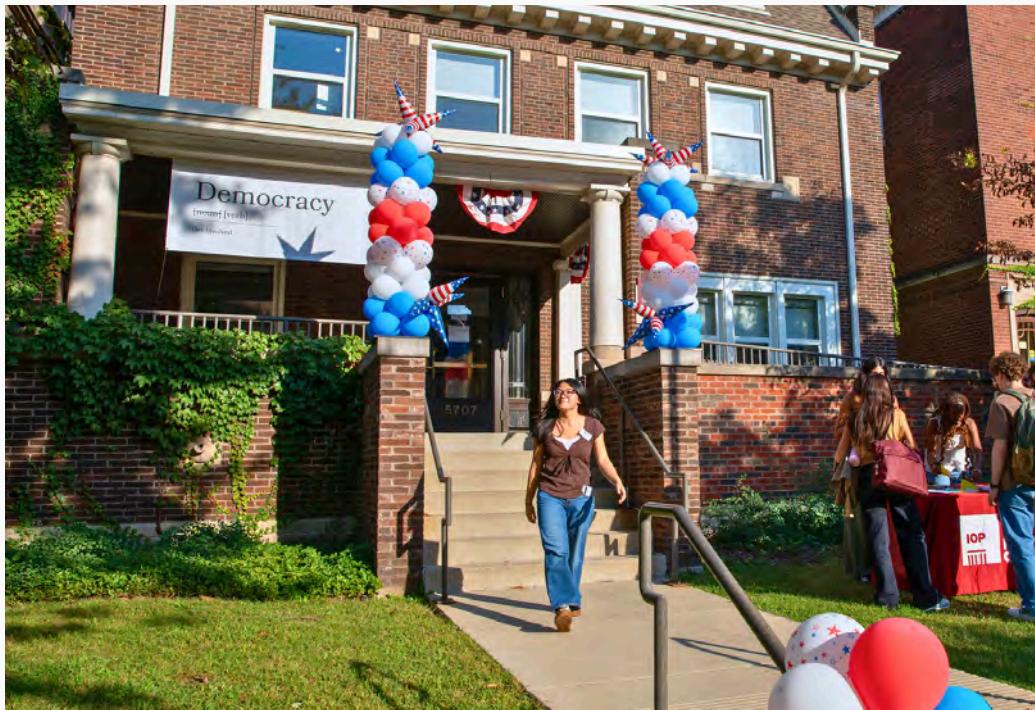
Civic Engagement

IOP students on an Immigration and Community Care Trek

We kicked off the year with our annual involvement fair, **Politipalooza**, which drew over 900 students from across the university and introduced first-year students to our programming.

The IOP's Civic Engagement Program serves as a "democracy learning lab" where students develop the tools to become leaders in their communities. This fall, our programming was defined by a strong commitment to civil discourse and rigorous inquiry. IOP student leaders were trained to facilitate open dialogue and model productive conversations on some of today's most contentious and emotionally charged issues. **Rather than remaining in ideological "safe spaces," our students demonstrate courage and curiosity as they engage with people they profoundly disagree with, challenging common stereotypes about college students today.**

In partnership with **Urban-Rural Action**, a national organization dedicated to bridging divides along geographic, racial and political lines, students received training in techniques for facilitating meaningful one-on-one dialogue. Equipped with these skills, students advanced the IOP's free expression mission by hosting workshops, forums and debates throughout the quarter.



Sophia Liu, AB '28, getting ready for the IOP's Politipalooza kickoff event

Our Student Advisory Board organized a series of **Dialogue Dinners** with IOP Pritzker Fellows, where students led small-group discussions on topics such as DEI, U.S. foreign policy, the nationalist discourse surrounding U.S.-China competition and political tensions within both major parties.

Civic Engagement programs also emphasized tackling local issues and gaining hands-on experience in public service. Students in our leadership development groups—Leaders of Color, Spectrum, and W+—immersed themselves in Chicago's advocacy landscape, hosting local activists and public officials at the IOP House for conversations on food insecurity during the government shutdown and immigrant rights amid ongoing ICE raids. This quarter, students also volunteered with organizations including The Orange Tent Project, Brave Space Alliance and local food pantries.

To deepen their understanding of policy at the local level, students participated in the Housing Development Policy Trek, exploring one of the most pressing issues facing Chicago and the nation: housing affordability. The trek featured discussions with experts from the Chicago Housing Authority and Housing Choice Partners of Illinois, followed by a visit to the National Public Housing Museum, connecting policy conversations to the lived experiences of residents in public housing.

Student-Led Groups



Members of *The Gate* recruiting new writers and editors at Politipalooza

Bridge

Bridge brings volunteers into Cook County Jail and the Illinois Youth Center to provide creative writing workshops and voter education to incarcerated individuals. Bridge also puts on events focused on criminal justice.

The Gate

The Gate, UChicago's political newspaper, publishes long-form articles on university, local, national and global politics. This fall, *The Gate* student leaders recruited over 45 new writers and hosted workshops with journalists Hanna Rosin and Jim Rutenberg.

Leaders of Color

Leaders of Color aims to address the current deficit of racial and ethnic diversity in public service by fostering an environment where students of all backgrounds can access leadership opportunities. The group organizes a yearly leadership development cohort, hosts events focused on public service and politics and provides community-building opportunities.

Spectrum

Open to all students, Spectrum organizes programming on LGBTQ+ and gender issues. This includes a yearly leadership development cohort, student sessions with LGBTQ+ leaders and community service projects.

TechTeam

TechTeam creates websites, builds apps and designs digital tools for community organizations and local governments.

UChiVotes

UChiVotes is a nonpartisan voter engagement initiative boosting voter turnout on campus. Even in an off-year election cycle, UChiVotes got students engaged in local and state races across the country, from NYC's mayoral election to Prop 50 in California.

W+

W+ organizes programming around issues impacting women and gender minorities within politics and public service. Through its leadership development and service cohorts, W+ empowers all students to explore and cultivate their passion for public service.



TechTeam executive board

Tech Team

This quarter, TechTeam continued its commitment to serving our local community by developing digital tools for Chicago-area nonprofits and civic organizations. By focusing on civic technology, TechTeam helps students in the tech and science fields explore meaningful careers in politics and public service.

Fall 2025 TechTeam Projects:

- Connections for Abused Women and their Children (CAWC): Building a secure, accessible multi-site web platform to support survivors across multiple program locations
- Hope Chicago: Upgrading a stipend tracker used by more than 2,000 Scholars to improve functionality and ease of use for students and staff
- DemystifyAI Chicago: Creating AI literacy modules and workshops to introduce participants to AI concepts, applications and ways to address bias and misinformation
- mRelief: Developing a web-scraping agent that maps the structure of SNAP application websites to support a redesigned, simplified user interface
- Code Your Dreams: Building a data visualization hub that turns program survey data into clear dashboards and visual reports for schools and funders
- Urban Rivers: Designing a web platform that compiles and visualizes ecological data from the Chicago River to show progress on cleanup and restoration efforts

Students meditate in community on a Tuesday morning



Students hear from recently arrived immigrants about their community work in Chicago



Trek students volunteering at a free store in Washington Park



Break Up With Social Media Week

The IOP challenged students to unplug from their screens and re-plug into their community through Break Up With Social Media Week. The initiative invited students, staff and Fellows to take a one-week break from social media and participate in community-building activities at the IOP House.

Few forces have proven more damaging to politics and public discourse than social media. Studies link the global rise in political hostility and hopelessness directly to social media use. Yet this initiative was not about disengaging from politics or tuning out the news. On the contrary, **students were encouraged to engage more deeply with the issues they care about—face-to-face, in community, and with empathy.**

The week began with three days of community-centered activities, including music sharing, meditation and trivia. These events aimed to foster genuine connections beyond the screen and outside the realm of politics. Midweek, the focus turned to dialogue and reflection. Members of the Student Advisory Board led a discussion exploring the effects of social media on politics, social movements and our mental health. Reflecting on the role of social media in their own political journeys, students weighed the democratizing potential of the internet, the dangers of algorithms and the spread of graphic imagery.

The week concluded with a trek focused on immigration and community care on Chicago's South Side. Students met with community leaders and recently arrived immigrants to learn about local immigration policy and the city's response to increased ICE activity. They then volunteered at a free store in Washington Park run by and for immigrants, providing direct support to their neighbors. With the presence of ICE felt even in Hyde Park, the trek allowed students to confront a complex national issue through tangible local action, embodying the goal of Local Motion.



Fall 2025 Policy Challenge

Improving Health Outcomes, One Neighbor at a Time

Amid a national government shutdown driven by debates over healthcare policy, the IOP challenged students to find local solutions to health issues in Illinois, Chicago and Cook County.

This year's Policy Challenge drew more than 20 teams (the largest number of participants in the program's history), reflecting the IOP's strategic outreach to the University's STEM students across the College and graduate programs. Dr. Susan Monarez, the first Senate-confirmed Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, was the final judge for the challenge.

The three finalist teams featured a diverse group of students from the College, the Harris School of Public Policy, the Booth School of Business and the Pritzker School of Medicine. Team **Chicago Winters and Decreasing Health**, comprised entirely of first-year undergraduate students, repurposed underused buildings as cooling centers to prevent extreme heat-related deaths in Chicago's South and West sides.

Team **Text to Health Illinois**, composed of three future physicians, proposed an automated text reminder system that enables patients to connect with community health workers and troubleshoot obstacles to keeping medical appointments.

The winning team, **Access Rx Chicago**, proposed the placement of pharmacy lockers in food pantries across Chicago to address the city's growing pharmacy deserts.

The IOP also invited universities across the country, including Eureka College, the University of Colorado and Temple University, to challenge their students to develop policy solutions to healthcare issues in their own communities. The winning teams will travel to Chicago in February to compete against the UChicago champions in our second **Policy Challenge Super Bowl**.

The IOP is proud to help other institutions establish their own policy challenge programs, empowering the next generation of policymakers to work to uplift communities at the local level.



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