



THE WORK OF BELONGING

UNIVERSITY YMCA ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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INTRODUCTION

THE WORK OF BELONGING

It feels like finding community. Discovering a place to call home. Being encouraged to live and thrive as your whole self. This is what we hear when we ask, “How do you feel at the University Y?”

As I reflect on the past year, one theme surfaces again and again: fostering belonging is challenging, vital work. Our mission calls us to develop leaders to dismantle barriers, build bridges, and unite others around a shared sense of purpose. But this transformation only happens when genuine relationships of trust and respect take root.

Our incoming Student President, Jackie Aguayo, recently studied belonging among college students. She found that when students feel included, they gain the confidence to support themselves, give back to others, and live more fully into their values. Her findings echo what we see every day at the Y in the work of the New American Welcome Center, among our third-floor residents, across our student organizations, and within our network of tenants and partners.

Belonging builds community. And community, in turn, fosters collective resilience.

As you read this annual report, I hope you’ll see how belonging permeates everything we do from immigration services to art that calls for justice, scholarships that make education accessible to interfaith collaborations addressing food insecurity. These efforts grow from gratitude, dialogue, and the collective work of diverse hands and hearts.

As Robin Wall Kimmerer reminds us, “Our spirits are nourished by a sense of belonging, which is the most vital of foods.” At the University Y, this truth guides us.

There has never been a more critical moment for this work. Thank you for belonging to our University Y community.



Jim

Jim Hinterlong, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Member since 1988

Our Board of Govenors repping!

2024-2025 STAFF

- AERAENA YANG**
Korean Community Worker, NAWC
- AKUA FORKUO-SEKYERE**
Director (former), New American Welcome Center
- AMY WHELPLEY**
DOJ Accredited Representative, NAWC
- ANDREA ARCINIEGAS**
Intake Specialist, NAWC
- ANN RASMUS**
Associate Director
- BELINDA GUILLÉN**
Immigrant Family Services Manager, NAWC
- COLE FILGES**
Resident Assistant
- DANIELA VERGARA**
Legal Services Director, NAWC
- ESTHER ASANDJO**
Francophone Community Worker, NAWC
- HUI-CHUNG HSIEH**
Chinese Community Worker, NAWC
- HUIQING ZHANG**
Grants Finance Manager, NAWC
- JEN ROMINE**
Office Manager & Bailey Program Administrator
- JENIFFER MOTA**
Intake Specialist, NAWC
- JIM HINTERLONG**
Executive Director
- JONATHAN ALDAY**
Legal Assistant, NAWC
- KEVIN HINES**
Custodian
- MARC ALEXANDER**
Director of Development & Membership
- MYMY GNAHORÉ**
Immigrant Family Services Caseworker, NAWC
- PAOLA AGUILERA**
Latine Community Worker, NAWC
- RICARDO DIAZ**
Interim Director, NAWC
- ROGER MASTER**
Building Superintendent
- ROSA IBETT GARCIA DE COLINA**
Community Worker, NAWC
- SYDNEY CURTS**
Director of Student Leadership & Engagement

- STUDENT ASSISTANTS & INTERNS**
- AARUSHI MITAL

AMELIE DALL'ERBA

CARLOS HERNANDEZ

CASSIE LOPEZ

CLAUDIA DANKWAH

DEIMANTE BRACIULIS

EMILIA QUIÑONES

FABI VEGA-SANCHEZ

FAITH EZEANYIM

JULIAN PADILLA

KIARA BARRAGAN

LIZELA FIGUEROA

MAIAH CABRAL

SHAREE ARTIST

YAMILETH CORTEZ

YICHEN WANG

THANK YOU TO THOSE WHOSE BOARD SERVICE ENDED DURING 2024-2025

- BAILEY WITTER

DESIREE RIOS

KEN SALO

LAUREN ARONSON

NIKIA BROWN

RUTA RAUBER

STACEY ROBINSON

WILL SCHERMER

OUR BOARDS

- BOARD OF GOVERNORS**
- JOE CHAMLEY
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NATHAN ALEXANDER
VICE-CHAIR

RIA BAWISKAR
TREASURER

MONICA SCOTT
SECRETARY

LILY RYBKA
STUDENT PRESIDENT

ROSS WANTLAND
(PAST CHAIR)

TOM SEALS
CHAIR

LAUREN HAYNES
VICE-CHAIR

RYNE DIONISIO
SECRETARY

ANNA TSAI

BETOEL ESCOBAR

ERIC VARGAS

FAIZI TOFIGHI

JENNIFER BERGMARK

KEV MURPHY

LEAH ROBBERTS-MOSSER

LINDA MATKOWSKI

MAYA MOLONEY

NINA STEPANIANTS

SOPHIE CHIEWTRAKOON

STEVE RUGG

TRACY DACE

VALERIE SIVICEK
- BOARD OF TRUSTEES**
- ADITI SINGH

ANNE ROBIN

CASSIE CARROLL

DARRELL HARTWEG

DEBBIE RUGG

DIANE PEARSE

ELLEN DAHLKE

GLORIA GLEAVE

GREG LINDSEY

JACK LAVIN

JAMES YOUNG

JAY CORWIN

JULIA KELLMAN

MARY BEASTALL

NAOMI JAKOBSSON

PHILIP MARTIN

REBECCA GUYETTE

RON HOFFMAN

SCOTT HERRICK

SCOTT PETERS

WILLARD BROOM
- EMERTIUS TRUSTEES (ALL DECEASED)**
- ARTHUR WYATT

GLENN STOUT

RALPH DAVIS

RICHARD HUTCHISON

THOMAS LATZER

WALTER MCMAHON

WILLIAM BROWDER
- STUDENT BOARD**
- LILY RYBKA
PRESIDENT

NINA STEPANIANTS
VICE-PRESIDENT

FAIZI TOFIGHI
TREASURER

RIA BAWISKAR
SECRETARY

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MEMBERSHIP DIRECTOR

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ALAN ESTRADA

ERIC VARGAS

ISA SARGAN

IZZY WILDER

JESSICA SAAVEDRA

KATHERINE TAKLA

LAUREN SIKMA

LESLEY ORTIZ

MAYA MOLONEY

MAYA SZYMCAK

PAIGE STEES

RUBY LUERAS

SOPHIE CHIEWTRAKOON



PROGRAMS

2,062

Friday Forum Attendees

1

Visit by the Mexican Ambassador

Introduction

From civic engagement to interfaith bridgebuilding, student leadership to impactful art, there's always something happening at the Y. Here's a look back at some of the programs, partnerships, and people that made this year a success.

Students view the Sustainable Design Senior Capstone Exhibition in Murphy Gallery.

ART @ THE Y

Art @ the Y had another year of powerful exhibitions that brought together art and activism into conversation!

During the 2024 election season, Kim Cosier, William Estrada, and the Art Build Workers presented a collaborative exhibit, **This is What Democracy Looks Like**. At the exhibition reception, attendees created their own voting yard signs and posters, transforming the gallery and front lawn into a space for civic expression.

In the spring, **American Peril: Faces of the Enemy** by Justin Chiu, featured a striking portrait series of the Japanese American and Muslim American individuals directly impacted by negative Japanese and Islamophobic propaganda.



Artist & Cultural Worker William Estrada creating art and civic expression in real time.



Art uncovers what needs to be understood.

Partnering with the Illinois Theatre Department, we hosted **Plumas Negras** as a precursor to their sold-out Krannert Center performance.

In April, **The Art of Recreating Transnational Solidarity Against Global Apartheids** brought together three voices against global apartheid: digital stories from grassroots activists for humane urbanisms, archival protest and encampment images from UIUC (1960s-2024), and visual artwork from the Woman Life Freedom movement.

To close out the academic year, the **Sustainable Design Senior Capstone** projects were displayed in the gallery, showcasing innovative student ideas.

Dump & Run

In August of 2024 the University Y held its 22nd Dump & Run®, culminating with the Big Sale over move-in weekend at the University of Illinois. This sustainability program continues as a valuable service to campus and the community, repurposing literal tons of usable goods from area landfills into dorm rooms, apartments, and homes.

Over 120 volunteers worked almost 1,000 hours during August, processing 280 collection dropoffs and 39 furniture pickups, all recent highs for the program. And roughly 3,700 individuals attended the sale days, participating in diverting this potential waste from our area landfills. The Big Sale continues to be an important resource of low cost



Thousands of students shopped at the Big Sale of move-in weekend.



goods for returning, incoming, and international students.

From our volunteers, to those who donate items, to Y staff and our partners at the University, Dump & Run is a true community effort that continues to provide a tangible impact on students and the local environment.



Staff and volunteers worked over 1,000 hours during collections and the Big Sale.

Friday Forum + Conversation Café

Friday Forum + Conversation Café remains a programming cornerstone, providing a space for local and nonlocal voices to lead timely, thought-provoking conversations. In ongoing partnership with the UIUC Diversity and Social Justice Education's Conversation Café, Friday Forum consistently draws 100+ attendees each week.

In the fall, the series focused on democracy and citizenship as we navigated the 2024 election season. Sean Morales-Doyle of the Brennan Center for Justice opened the series with a discussion on **voting rights**. Later, we welcomed civic organizers Harry Boyte and Marie Ström, now based at Augsburg University, to discuss **Democracy as a Way of Life**. The spring series elevated student voices and organizing efforts. Joined by alumna, Diana Rashid, members of La Colectiva, I-CAUSE, and La Casa students discussed the **current state of immigrant rights** on campus and in the broader community. Later in the semester, Students for Environmental Concerns used the platform to call for **divestment from the fossil fuel industry**.

Throughout the year, we were honored to host many impactful leaders. These included County Clerk Aaron Ammons, journalist Jeremy Hobson, Vice Chancellor Sean Garrick, Rev. Terrance Thomas, and national Indigenous activist Tara Houska, among others.



La Colectiva student Reynaldo Camas during their panel discussion.



Activist Tara Houska spoke on her work as a Tribal Attorney and Land Defender.

Interfaith

The University Y remains an active member of the Interfaith Alliance of Champaign County and the Religious Workers Association, and supports the Interfaith in Action student group, providing great opportunities for partnership in programming.

Together with our partners, we co-facilitate the monthly First Tuesday Interfaith Events, rotating among local places of worship. These gatherings create a space for shared reflection and community across faith traditions.

We also hosted the **Annual Illinois Interfaith Conference** with this year's keynote speaker, Allison Briscoe Smith. She delivered a Friday Forum and keynote address on "Beloved Community." Attendees also participated in service workgroups, volunteering at Sola Gratia Farm and Jubilee Cafe.



People from across the Midwest gathered to build community and engage in service.

Interfaith in Action is one of the Y's most dynamic student organizations.



International Dinner

On Friday, April 4th the Y held its 40th International Dinner. Full of lively music and great food, a completely sold out Latzer Hall welcomed cuisine from local immigrant-owned restaurants including El Oasis, La Paloma, Le Gourmet Cuisine, Shawarma Joint, Y-Thai, with coffee and tea provided by Columbia Street Roastery. The audience was entertained by a mariachi band from Urbana High School, traditional Chinese music from the Jasmine Field Orchestra and other international themed music. The International Dinner continues to be a celebration of the diverse cultures and communities in Champaign-Urbana.



Tickets sold out almost immediately.



Local artists delighted the audience.



Music from around the globe filled the evening.

New American Welcome Center

40

➤ Individuals Became U.S. Citizens

\$187,142

➤ Disbursed to Support Immigrants in Champaign County

28

➤ Home Countries of Our Clients



NAWC Staff Members

NAWC staff represent eight countries and speak a dozen languages.

Welcoming Week 2024, themed “We Are All In,” was an unforgettable celebration of community, diversity, and unity.

Our kick-off event drew more than 600 attendees who enjoyed free food, games, and music in a joyful and inclusive atmosphere. The event was emceed by three of our staff members, who helped create a dynamic, multicultural, and multilingual experience that reflected the heart of our mission.

While success goes far beyond numbers, this year’s Welcoming Week featured an impressive 40 events and reached over 4,000 community members. Each gathering offered opportunities for connection, cultural exchange, and mutual support, helping to strengthen the bonds that make our community more welcoming for everyone.

At the New American Welcome Center (NAWC), our mission has always been to co-create a community where immigrants can thrive and flourish. Over the past eight years, we’ve made tremendous strides toward that vision—building partnerships, offering vital services, and standing alongside immigrant communities every step of the way.

And we’re just getting started. We remain deeply committed to uplifting, empowering, and serving immigrants in our community, today, tomorrow, and for years to come.

A New Director for NAWC

Francisco Baires

Returns to Advance the Work of Belonging

We are excited to welcome Francisco Baires back to the University Y, where his leadership will continue advancing the Work of Belonging in our community. Francisco brings a unique blend of lived experience and professional dedication to working for justice for newcomer communities. Born in El Salvador during a period of political violence, his family moved to the U.S.–Mexico border along South Texas, where he was raised in a mixed status family.

These formative experiences gave him a deep appreciation for the strength of immigrant communities and a lasting commitment to building communities where everyone feels seen, valued, and welcomed. Francisco's career has centered on this very work. He has led initiatives in community organizing, policy advocacy, and immigrant family engagement—serving as Director

of Diversity, Inclusion, and Global Initiatives at the YMCA of Greater Hartford and as Education Service Specialist for family engagement at the Capital Region Education Council. In these roles, he connected children and families to critical educational resources and helped institutions become more inclusive.

From 2011–2014, Francisco served as Community Programs Director at the University Y, where he partnered with the C-U Immigration Forum to develop support services for new arrivals and helped launch La Línea, the helpline that remains a cornerstone of the New American Welcome Center's intake and referral system. This body of work helped build the trust and infrastructure that made the founding of NAWC possible in 2016.

Now returning to the Y, Francisco looks forward to supporting the

Francisco Baires
NAWC Director 2025



amazing staff at NAWC and working alongside community-based partners to co-create a community where all immigrants can thrive and flourish. His leadership is a powerful reminder that the Work of Belonging is never done alone—it is cultivated through relationships, shared vision, and deep commitment to justice for all.



A vibrant democracy requires dialogue.

Democracy

In 2024, our Student Board and Board of Governors established strengthening democracy as a strategic priority. Catalyzed by leadership gifts from trustees Walt McMahon (deceased) and Philip Martin, we explored how the University YMCA can support and encourage those in our campus and community to be informed, empowered and engaged contributors to a thriving, inclusive democracy. As our collaborators, Harry Boyte and Marie Ström put it: we are fostering active citizenship and a commitment to democracy as a way of life.

On election day, nearly 500 students voted at the Y. Working with the League of Women Voters, our Student Board organized a voter registration contest. SECS and La Colectiva tied for the most new registrants.

500

Students Voted at the Y
Over 15 Hours On Election Day

On election day, over 15 hours, nearly 500 students voted at the Y. Glitches early in the day led to long delays. The staff tirelessly provided pizza, popcorn, and water as some waited 5+ hours to cast their ballot.

Democracy permeated our programming throughout the year pre- and post-election. Friday Forum and Art @ the Y explored some of the formidable challenges we face in making democracy work for everyone.

Our students sought solutions.

Two groups from the Global Leaders Program spent the year developing programming ideas that build upon the Y's role as a free space for civic action and imagination in the campus and community. Another group looked to history as a guide, and gathered to explore how non-violence methods might play a role in seeking change. We'll invest further in those hope-filled ideas this coming year.

Reasons to vote
sprung up daily on
the front lawn.



Student Engagement & Leadership Development

The building is buzzing with student activity! On any given evening at the Y, you will find students studying in Clark Lounge, hosting workshops in Murphy Gallery, attending formal events in Latzer Hall, or organizing with their peers in the newly named Solidarity Room¹.



Engineers Without Borders celebrated 20 years of bringing resources and professional services to communities around the globe.

¹At the 2025 Annual Dinner & Auction, Amnesty International won the bid to rename the Student Programs Office (SPO) for 2025–2026, now known as the Solidarity Room.

15

Student Led Organizations Call the Y Their Home



Fifteen affiliated student organizations call the Y their home, each championing a unique cause. La Colectiva and I-CAUSE held Know Your Rights workshops in response to growing concerns around immigrant rights. Interfaith in Action organized a trivia night fundraiser benefiting the Strides Homeless Shelter. Alternative Seasonal Breaks continued to rebuild momentum, sending two successful service-learning trips over Spring Break.

Of course, our community extends beyond our affiliated organizations. Some students come for a quick Y Thai lunch, while others are drawn in by our programs. We're also fortunate to work alongside a group of wonderful student assistants and interns.

We wouldn't be who we are without students sharing their time, talents, and passions with us. This report highlights just a few of the incredible leaders and organizations shaping the Y (and beyond) today.



Interfaith in Action Members proudly display their Bailey Scholarship awards.

BAILEY SCHOLARS



For nearly 70 years, the Bailey Scholarship Program has empowered University of Illinois students to develop as both scholars and changemakers. More than just financial support, the Bailey Program fosters a cohort of diverse, passionate students who are actively making a difference on campus and in their communities.

Bailey Scholars engage within the life of the Y. They attend programs and events, support one another's efforts, and develop leadership and professional skills while in the Program. Whether they are working to promote environmental sustainability, civic engagement, interfaith bridge building, or more, they are demonstrating what it means to lead with purpose.

The 2024-2025 Bailey Recipients after the Fall Awards Reception.

Each year, interest in the Program continues to grow. For the 2024-2025 academic year, we awarded 47 scholarships across our four awards. That's \$198,000 directly supporting students' education!

198,000

› **Dollars in scholarships given**

47

› **Scholars and Fellows**

11%

› **International Student Scholars**

Student Profiles

TOMI DUGBO '26

Bailey Scholar

Tomi Dugbo was introduced to the University YMCA during her freshman year of college through her TRIO Student Support Services advisor, Dr. Urius Escobar, who told her about the Bailey Scholarship Program. Designed to support high-achieving Illinois students committed to community involvement, the program immediately caught Tomi's attention. Inspired by the opportunity, she began engaging more deeply, both across campus and with the Y.

She soon started attending College of Media events hosted at the Y, as well as the weekly Friday Forums + Conversation Cafés. These gatherings quickly became meaningful learning spaces, allowing Tomi to hear from a wide range of voices within the university and the broader community. Through these experiences, she developed as a leader and deepened her involvement in the communities she serves.

One of Tomi's favorite aspects of the Bailey Program is the consistent support it offers. From regular check-ins to weekly newsletters, she appreciates how the Y keeps Bailey Scholars informed and connected, even when busy schedules make it difficult to attend events in person. That sense of care and community has had a lasting impact on her college experience. Her time at the Y helped Tomi understand what genuine community engagement looks like. It also inspired her to expand her leadership in other areas. She currently serves as the Director of Marketing for the Illini Union



Board, Vice President of the National Association of Black Journalists Illinois Chapter, and is spending the summer before her senior year as a Product Marketing Intern and Social Ambassador for Ford Motor Company.

Tomi is deeply grateful for the support she has received through the Y and the Bailey Scholarship Program. As she looks ahead, she hopes to continue giving back, both as a student and, one day, as an alum.

Student Profiles

AMANDA JAMROG '27

Student Board | Project 4 Less | Democracy

Amanda was introduced to the University YMCA in their freshman year, when Project 4 Less, a food recovery RSO, applied and was accepted to become a Y-affiliated organization. Amanda loved Project 4 Less because of their ability to target food waste and food insecurity simultaneously by redistributing excess dining hall food to the CU community. Through filling out this application with their other P4L members, Amanda realized just how aligned the University YMCA's values were to P4L's and their own. The YMCA's commitment to social justice and environmentalism resonated with Amanda particularly, as well as their countless opportunities to connect with the whole Champaign-Urbana community, beyond the university.

In Amanda's sophomore year, their involvement with the Y grew even deeper, as they took advantage of the valuable words shared (and free Y-Thai) every Friday at Friday Forums and became Project 4 Less's Student Board Representative. One Friday Forum, led by Harry Boyte and Marie Ström, led Amanda to join a group of students in having several conversations about how they all could promote a sense of democracy and dialogue on campus.

As someone pursuing a career in education, Amanda took these lessons learned through these democracy talks and committed to the idea that similar dialogues about community and social justice should be held among our youth. Through this, Amanda and Project



4 Less connected with several schools in the community to educate them about food waste/food insecurity, and ways to reduce them.

Beyond the YMCA, Amanda has been a peer mentor for the Illinois Scholars Program for two years. They love helping incoming freshmen acclimate to the University of Illinois' campus through classes, research, and trips around the community, as they were a mentee their freshman year and found the program extremely helpful. Amanda studies History, Spanish, and Secondary Education, and plans to study abroad in the Fall of 2025 in Madrid, Spain to improve their Spanish language acquisition and teaching skills through an internship at a local school.

Student Profiles

AVERHY SANBORN '26

Students for Environmental Concerns

Averhy Sanborn crossed paths with the Y her sophomore year at a Friday Forum. She loved that the Forum gave an opportunity for students and community members to learn together, which drove her to help connect the student organizations she's a part of to the Y.

In line with the Y's commitment to environmental protection, Averhy joined Students for Environmental Concerns (SECS) her freshman year, and believes it was the best decision of her college career. Averhy served as Treasurer for two years, and is now the President! This connection allowed for SECS to present on divestment from fossil fuels at a Friday Forum in the spring of 2025, giving an opportunity for the community to become informed and involved in the changes that students want to see. Over the course of this past year, she has been thrilled to see SECS rejoin the Y and looks forward to seeing both organizations evolve and grow for years to come!

Averhy has also had the pleasure of working alongside the Y in fostering social justice for Native peoples. A Friday Forum event with Charlene Teters, one of the leaders in the movement to remove the prior mascot, inspired Averhy to join the Kingfisher movement. Over the course of a year, Averhy worked with other like-minded students to create The King's Guard, which is a new RSO that aims to implement the Belted Kingfisher as the new mascot of UIUC. In her role as President, Averhy has met with the Y to



imagine how a new mascot could find a home on campus and in the hearts of students.

Beyond her campus activities, Averhy is an avid cook and enjoys hosting house shows with her roommates. As she looks towards the future, Averhy is excited to apply to graduate school for urban planning to make cities more pedestrian, bike, and public transit friendly!



Student Profiles

NINA STEPANIANTS '25

Student Board | Board of Governors |
Amnesty International | Bailey Scholar

Nina Stepaniants learned about the University YMCA through her involvement in UIUC's chapter of Amnesty International, which she joined due to a passion for human rights, social justice, and advocacy. Her experiences in Amnesty have shaped her worldview and provided her with a community of like-minded student activists. During her time with Amnesty, Nina was introduced to the values and programs of the YMCA, and was inspired to join the Y's Student Board and Board of Governors.

The YMCA provided her with a space to build a welcoming community while learning about the world around her. Quickly, the Y became a home, as well as a meeting space for social justice organizing. The Y has supported Amnesty's work, allowing the student organization to demonstrate for Palestinian liberation, educate its fellow students about their right to protest at the University of Illinois and about refugee and migrant rights, and raise over \$11,000 this past year for various charities and organizations that align with Amnesty's values. Its pillars of social justice and global engagement, as well as its long history with significant on-campus movements and dialogue, have helped shape Nina's professional and academic goals and passions. The Y's Bailey Scholars program allowed Nina to pursue external opportunities and grow as a leader in the university activist community and beyond.



In the University YMCA, Nina has not only found a welcoming environment to study, organize, and eat delicious tofu pad thai, but she has also found a community. The YMCA's staff, programs, and opportunities have supported her undergraduate experience in every possible way, be it mentorship, financial support, or professional development.

Student Profiles

VIRAJ KAPUR '27

Engineers Without Borders

The Y recently celebrated its 150th anniversary—a milestone that reflects a long legacy of trust, service, and student-driven impact. For Engineers Without Borders (EWB), and many other Y-affiliated organizations working toward meaningful change, the Y has been a steady, reliable partner.

Viraj Kapur first got involved with the Y during his freshman year, mostly through regular visits to deposit fundraising money as EWB's treasurer. It was a simple task, but over time, he started to recognize just how central the Y was to student life. Marc was always up for a quick conversation, Sydney would say hello, and Jim's familiar presence made the space feel approachable. The time he spent here felt grounded and welcoming.

What stood out to him most, though, was the range of ideas and people the Y brought together. Coming from a largely engineering-focused environment, he found it refreshing to be in a space that exposed him to broader perspectives—social issues, governance, community organizing. One memory that stands out is a Y-hosted workshop on governance. At a time when conversations on campus felt uncertain, it offered him a space that encouraged reflection without pressure or judgment. It made him think differently, and he finds himself thankful for the lucky coincidence of becoming involved with the Y.

Celebrating EWB's 20th anniversary at the



Y was another reminder of the role it plays. Seeing alumni return and stories being shared across generations reinforced just how much of their growth as an organization was supported within that space and it was a real full circle moment.

Viraj says, "The Y doesn't ask for recognition ever, but it deserves it. It's helped support me countless times, in all my crazy initiatives, but also acted as a voice of reason and sometimes sobriety. Engaging with them continuously to build EWB has been one of my favorite parts of my college experience."

As he begins his junior year and second semester as EWB President, he's looking forward to continuing that partnership. The Y has helped him grow—not just in leadership, but in perspective. And that's something he values and wishes for others to personally experience, too.

Our Student Organizations



Amnesty International @ UIUC
IG @uiucamnesty



Engineers Without Borders
IG @ewb.uiuc



Philippine Student Association
IG @psa_uiuc



Nuestra Verdad Publicación
IG @nuveuiuc



Vis-A-Vis
IG @visavis.uiuc



SCAN @ UIUC
IG @scan.uiuc



Interfaith In Action
IG @interfaithinaction



I-CAUSE
IG @icauseuiuc



La Colectiva
IG @lacolectivaiuc



Grow2Give
IG @grow2givecu



RASI
IG @rasi.uiuc



vermiCULTURE
IG @vermiculture.uiuc



SECS
IG @secsuiuc



Alternative Seasonal Breaks
IG @uiucasb



Project 4 Less
IG @project4less

1873

Students for Environmental Concerns
Affiliated 1968

Vis-A-Vis
Affiliated 1981

Alternative Seasonal Breaks
Affiliated 1989

Philippine Student Association
Affiliated 1998

Amnesty International
Affiliated 2001

Engineers Without Borders
Affiliated 2007

Interfaith in Action
Affiliated 2010

La Colectiva
Affiliated 2010

vermiCULTURE
Affiliated 2021

Grow2Give
Affiliated 2021

Save the Children Action Network
Affiliated 2022

I-CAUSE
Affiliated 2022

RASI
Affiliated 2022

P4L
Affiliated 2024

NUVE
Affiliated 2024

2025



Members of SECS on the Quad.

SECS

Students for Environmental Concerns (SECS) is the oldest and largest environmental student organization at the University of Illinois. Through six working groups – Action, Policy, Education, Media, Land Stewardship, and the Green Observer – SECS encourages students to engage with the environment on multiple levels.

This past spring, one of these levels included members of the Policy group speaking at a Friday Forum event at the Y! To start, Jim Hinterlong, the Y's executive director, gave an overview of the Y's responsible investing policies, which transitioned into SECS members discussing how the Y has set a great precedent for how organizations with a commitment to environmental and social justice should act. A key

“Despite the barrage of attacks on environmental and social movements around the globe, SECS will stand strong against hate and fear.”

goal for SECS is for the university to achieve divestment. In this case, divestment would mean the removal of the University of Illinois System's millions of dollars invested in companies that profit from the extraction, refinement, sale, and transport of fossil fuels. In the spring

of 2025, SECS worked to pass a referendum asking students if the University of Illinois System should remove its fossil fuels investments within 5 years. The referendum passed with a strong majority of 72.94%, signaling overwhelming student support for this action. While the work to achieve this goal continues, SECS plans to enact visible change in the community this coming year as well.

Despite the barrage of attacks on environmental and social movements around the globe, SECS will stand strong against hate and fear. This year will bring activities including the 4th annual pumpkin smashing and composting event, trash pickups, demonstrations, camping, letter



writing, and more! If you are an interested student, you can find SECS on Instagram @secsuiuc and in person every Wednesday from 6:30–7:30 at the Channing Murray Foundation. The Earth needs us now more than ever, and SECS is determined to keep fighting the good fight!



SECS' efforts help lead to the passing of a referendum on divestiture from fossil fuels at UIUC.



Rise Up for Science organizes a successful march.

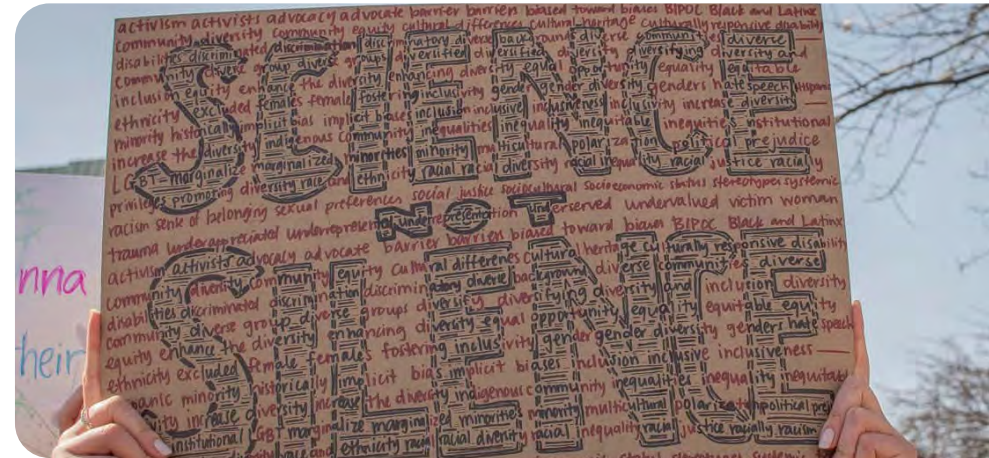
Rise Up for Science

Last winter a group of mostly graduate students came together out of frustration with the apparent lack of resistance to the short sighted, racist, and illegal attacks on science and members of the scientific community. It's easy to target science when it's an abstract concept without a face. Rise Up For Science formed to bridge the scientific and activist communities of CU, defend Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and demand an end to censorship and political interference in science. They work with CU community members to advocate for science by leading marches, coordinating science outreach, connecting scientists with secondary students and the community at large, and engaging in other forms of peaceful resistance.

The University Y Board agreed to help Rise Up press forward as a sponsor.

From Rise Up's leaders:

"This spring, Rise Up For Science organized two marches and held a large science communication event. We adjusted our outreach to protect international students, and when the President announced that any protests might be met by the National Guard we held hands and decided we'd show up anyways. We partnered with Stand Up For Science in March to hold one of the first large protests in Urbana-Champaign in 2025 with over 400 people in attendance, and in April we held our own March for Science with over 200 attendees. At the same time



The University Y supports those speaking out for justice.

we held The People's Science Fair, which brought together scientists, conservation organizations, and community health groups to engage with CU community members. As we witness other universities bow to financial and political pressure, and the military in the streets to meet protestors, it is more important now than ever to stand in solidarity and refuse to be silent.

None of us have run an organization like this before, but all of our events this spring were successful, and that's largely due to the support of the University YMCA. They gave us access to critical resources, provided a centralized location for fundraising, and enabled us to connect to key groups and individuals which in turn

allowed us to reach the children and other community members we hoped to bring together. The need for an organized resistance in science has only become more dire in recent weeks, but we're just getting started! We can't underscore enough that the venn diagram between activism and science is a circle. If you want to get involved or stay up to date about future actions check us out at www.riseupforscience.com or email us at uiuc4science@gmail.com."

“...it is more important now than ever to stand in solidarity and refuse to be silent.”

Alumni Spotlight

Jesse Hoyt

B.A. '11



In my junior year at the U of I, I was president of La Colectiva, a student group focused on advocating for social justice and change with and for immigrants in the C-U area. At a time when students and community

members were under-resourced and targeted for their immigrant status we were connected to the University YMCA and some of its student-led organizations. We were inspired to learn about how the

University YMCA nurtured spaces for student organizations to meet, grow and share their work both on and off campus. We quickly decided to join as an organization to join fellow student leaders and a YMCA staff that cared deeply about the mission and values of its community. Personally, the University YMCA was home away from home. It was a place where I knew I was safe and could find community with students and adults who cared about the issues I cared about and wanted to put their values into action.

At the University YMCA I learned valuable lessons about collaboration, coalition building, and leadership development. The staff at the 'Y' ensured we had a physical space, financial support and resources to train and connect with other groups both on and off campus. And most importantly I built relationships and friendships that over 15 years later I still cherish.

After graduation, the skills that I grew and the abilities I nurtured at the University YMCA I was able to put to great use. I began my career as a community organizer and political operative. Over the last 14 years I have worked on local and statewide campaigns fighting for social justice

on issues of affordable housing, immigration reform and access to affordable and quality healthcare and environmental justice. In nearly every step of my career I can trace back elements of my success to the invaluable time with La Colectiva and the University YMCA. Currently, as Executive Director of ONE Northside I am constantly reminded of the spaces where I was able to experiment, learn and grow at the "Y" and wish to replicate that with my staff, young leaders and staff. My time at the "Y" created a wonderful space for me during my undergraduate experience and challenged me to re-create that community wherever I would be in the future.



La Colectiva was and remains a force for positive change.

Time Capsule Dedication

On May 3, 2025, the University YMCA community gathered in Latzer Hall to honor our history, celebrate our present, and imagine the promise of our future. Together, we filled two time capsules to be opened on our 200th Anniversary in 2073.

One capsule was dedicated to our affiliated student organizations with each receiving a small container to contribute to the larger whole. The second held a rich collection of items reflecting our programs and daily life, including a digital recorder filled with stories and reflections from members, added just before sealing.

Both capsules were placed inside a brick vault on the north side of our building, marked by a bronze plaque that invites generations to come to join in our ongoing journey of dialogue, reflection, and action.

See more photos: <https://150th.universityymca.org/>



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In memory of Gerald Brighton by Joan Brighton • In memory of Cathi Corwin by Gloria & Fred Gleave • In honor of Heather Grossman by Claire Psarouthakis • In honor of Patricia Hund by Ross Wantland & Anita Hund • In honor of Robert & Claudia Kirby by Tracy Dace • In memory of Walt McMahon by Mary Beastall, Jennifer Delaney, Gerri Kirchner, Danielle Matthews, and Debbie & Steve Rugg • In memory of Kathy Richey by Gretchen Sanders

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Gifts made from July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025. Thank you to all of our members, grantors and sponsors for their support.

Scan the QR code to make a gift to the Y, a specific program, or an endowed fund.



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Our Endowment provides resources for general operating expenses and specific programs. We gratefully acknowledge members who made a gift to an endowed fund this year.

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Student Program Director Fund

Marc Alexander
Rev. Jim Young

Leadership Awards

Each year, the University YMCA honors individuals who positively impact our mission and the Champaign-Urbana community. Award recipients are recognized for their commitment to service, and to service and our Association. We are pleased to present our 2025 recipients.



Nathan Alexander

Distinguished Service Award (Non-Student)

Helen Zhang

J. Frederick Miller Award for Volunteer Service

Benny Benavides

Distinguished Service Award (Student)

Darrell Hartweg

Edward Nestingen Distinguished Alumni Award

Jacklyn Vargas

Distinguished Service Award (Student)

Nina Stepaniants

John W. Price Award for Volunteer Service to International Understanding

Amanda Hwu

Gerald Brighton Young Alumni Award

Sofia Castro

Harold W. Colvin Award for Undergraduate Leadership

REFLECTIONS FROM OUR STUDENT PRESIDENT

I first got a taste of how the Y empowers students like me during my very first week of college at an interfaith picnic. Staff and students welcomed me and introduced opportunities that I've come to value deeply, including the student organizations I've been involved with for nearly three years now. At the University YMCA, these student groups advocate for a wide range of social justice areas including environmental sustainability, human rights, immigration, food security and interfaith bridgebuilding.

"The Y is my home away from home... It's a place where I know I'll always be supported in any endeavor I put my mind to, and where I've grown so much as a leader."

As the Student Board President this past year, I got to experience and collaborate with students I would never have met otherwise. I, along with the University Y and the Student Board, have grown so much this year. We welcomed back



Students for Environmental Concerns, we grew our Alternative Seasonal Break Program to two trips this past spring, had a Voter Registration drive competition between our student organizations, and celebrated together with our second consecutive annual Y Prom!

Personally, connecting with past Student Presidents from different eras has been the highlight of my year as Student Board President. I am constantly inspired by the University YMCA. Students here are fighting to make a difference on campus and around the world, Y Staff uplift us, and the Y Community provides structure,

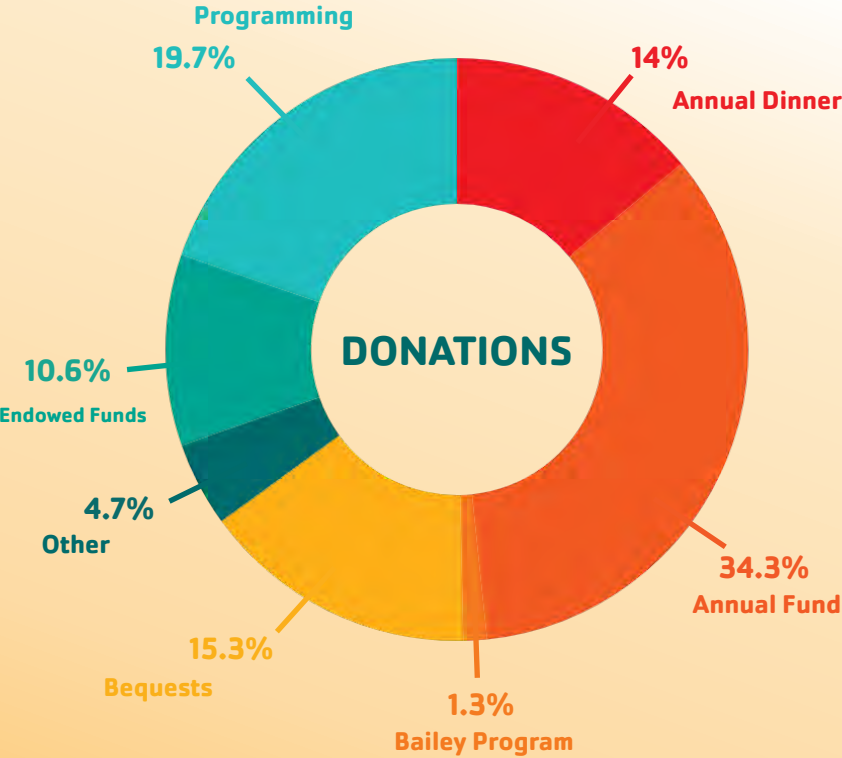
advice, and opportunities.

When I talk to student leaders and community members about the University Y, often I hear it described as a home. The Y is my home away from home, too. It's a place where I know I'll be supported in any endeavor I put my mind to, and where I've grown so much as a leader. I feel lucky to have another year at the Y before I graduate, and I could not be more excited to spend it alongside the new Student Board and the entire Y community.

It has been an honor to have been Student Board President. I am excited for all the great work that will be done here in the years ahead. Your support is crucial to the growth and opportunities we experience at the University YMCA.

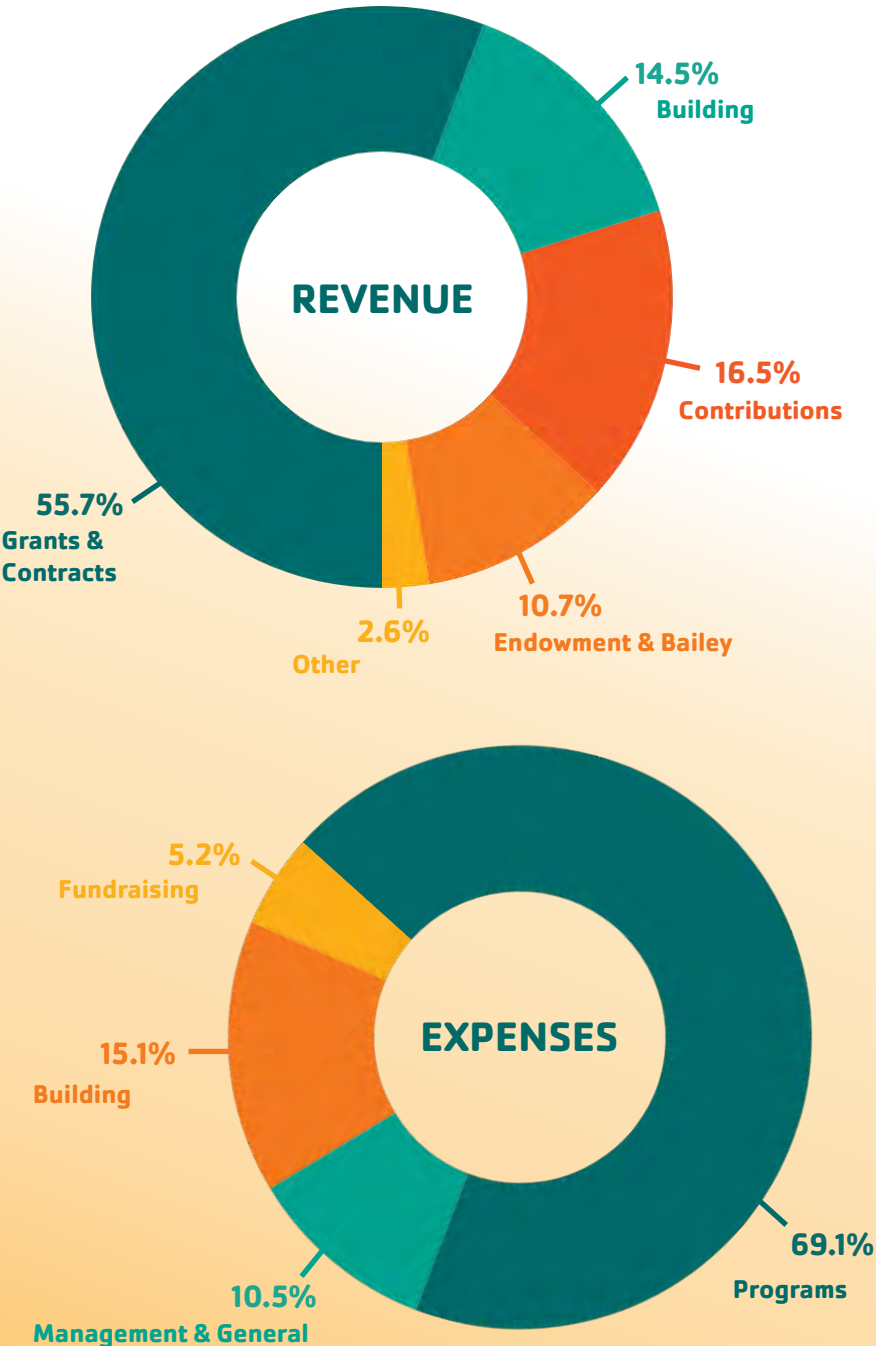
Lily Rybka
Student President
2024-2025

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