



US EMPOWERED
Urban Students Empowered Foundation



Annual Report

July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2008

We have seen what it takes to empower a student. Help us empower a nation.



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Friends,

I write to you in the midst of an exciting, transformational time for our work together. This summer we concluded our first year of major expansion at US Empowered and are poised for another extraordinary year. We have never more acutely felt the need to expand our services to reach more students, schools, and communities. This past year we reconfirmed the effectiveness of our teacher-led program and heightened our sense of urgency to make higher education a reality for all of urban America.

We have learned much since our pilot program began five years ago. We learned that students from all academic backgrounds can make a transformative shift in the latter years of high school. We learned that identifying, recruiting, training, and supporting great teachers in our effort is the most effective way to make systemic change in underserved schools. We learned that all students, regardless of their backgrounds, need specific resources and support structures in order to transition effectively into college. Finally, we learned that all students need comprehensive support programs during their first year of college to smoothly embark on their collegiate career.

US Empowered proves that organizational growth can actually increase programmatic success. As you will see in our annual report, our Fellows and teachers broke several programmatic records this past year while our program tripled in size. Likewise, all of our graduating seniors were admitted into their top choice schools last spring. They will be heading off to schools such as Howard University in Washington D.C. and Denison University in Granville, Ohio.

This fall we will more than double in size again, expanding our incoming class from 31 to 72 students and partnering with four more schools throughout the city. Our staff has grown from one to five team members during this past year and we now support 15 dynamic teachers who lead our Fellowship program in their respective schools.

Please browse through our annual report to see detailed successes of this past year and our plans for this coming year. We will depend on your continued support in the year ahead. On behalf of our students, teachers, schools, staff, and Board of Directors, thank you for your support and shared commitment to ending educational inequality throughout Chicago and beyond.

Warmest regards,

Jeff Nelson
Executive Director

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Our Mission

Urban Students Empowered Foundation (US Empowered) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to providing urban students with the resources, support and network necessary to make higher education a reality. US Empowered fulfills this mission by providing comprehensive, program-based Fellowships to groups of students in low-income schools in Chicago.

When a student (Fellow) enters US Empowered, he/she is expected to do two things: gain acceptance to a four-year university and earn his/her degree. In order to ensure successful fulfillment of these goals, US Empowered provides our Fellows with three-year Fellowships that encompass the final two years of high school and the first year of college.

Our Fellowship

Each year of the three-year Fellowship is uniquely tailored to build a bridge between high school and college. During the first two years of the Fellowship, students take six courses that function as a "road map" for college admission and post-secondary success. These courses—ranging from College 101 to Acing the ACT to College Preparedness—are designed to elevate personal expectations, increase test scores, produce exceptional applications, and prepare students for academic and personal success in selective four-year universities.

Class of 2013 Growth

Average GPA Increase:
2.8 to 3.27 (one semester)

Preliminary ACT Growth:
14.5 to 17.0 (three months)

Attendance Rate: 97.7%

Additionally, this innovative curriculum goes beyond the classroom, exposing our students to monthly college conferences, networking events, college counseling services, and scholarship support. In the final year of the program, US Empowered provides college-preparedness workshops and partners students with faculty and student mentors at their new universities.

During our history, 100 percent of our Fellows have been admitted into four-year universities, with 79 percent enrolling in their top-choice school. Likewise, all of our Fellows are still on target to graduate from an institution of higher education. **Without providing any direct scholarships, our students have secured an average of 80 percent of their college costs** through grants and scholarships. Furthermore, our students have exceeded all of our secondary measures of success, increasing their collective GPA from 2.95 to 3.40 and ACT average from 16.5 to 19.2 in just two years.

The Issues: Fighting Educational Inequality in our Schools

While affluent high schools graduate nearly 100 percent of incoming ninth graders, urban school districts with large low income populations often graduate fewer than half their ninth graders.

New York State Education Department

Children from low-income communities are seven times less likely to graduate from college than their peers in high-income communities.

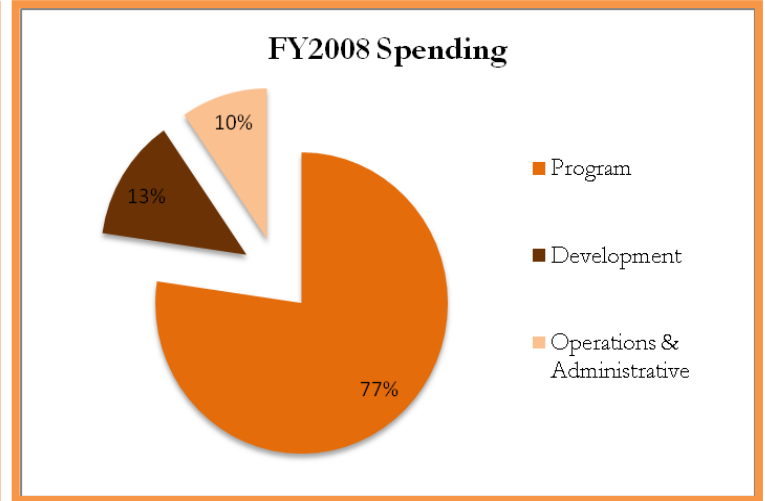
National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Only 18 percent of incoming Chicago Public School ninth graders are expected to enroll in a four-year university after high school and only six percent are expected to graduate by the time they are 25.

Consortium on Chicago School Research, University of Chicago.

"US Empowered helped me to understand just how important grades are and how being a good student helps with college admissions. US Empowered also opened up doors for me and has educated me about college. I appreciate it because now I know exactly what to do when I get to college."

Shaquita Martin, Class of 2013 (South Shore School of Entrepreneurship)



Financial Development

US Empowered is fortunate to have an array of supporters ranging from foundation and corporate partners to individual donors, as well as runners who participate in our annual Race-To-Empower campaign. US Empowered remains immensely grateful to all of our supporters. Without your commitment, we would not be able to provide our Fellows with the services and support they need.

The past year was our first year of external development. We exceeded our internal goal of raising \$210,000 by garnering \$223,673—a 350 percent increase in revenue from the previous operational year—which has provided US Empowered with the resources and stability needed to continue our expansion to even more low-income Chicago schools.

We look forward to the upcoming year, furthering our efforts to grow and diversify our support base. By establishing and maintaining relationships with both Chicago-based and national foundations, corporate philanthropists, our individual donors, and our growing Race-To-Empower Team, US Empowered will continue to grow. We are excited to reach a larger base of Fellows, grow our program and events, and make college a reality for more students.

US Empowered: Financial Trajectory				
Revenue Streams	(Actual) FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011
Events	81,800	168,000	200,000	300,000
Foundations	59,000	97,000	200,000	375,000
Individual Giving	72,873	200,000	320,000	540,000
Corporations	10,000	15,000	40,000	135,000
Totals	223,673	480,000	800,000	1,500,000
Expenditures	(Actual) FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011
Program Costs	123,916	352,281	536,000	900,000
Development Costs	20,932	59,875	93,800	157,500
Operations & Administrative Costs	15,373	27,359	40,200	67,500
Totals	160,221	439,515	670,000	1,125,000

Our History: US Empowered began in a single high school on Chicago's south side five years ago. The founding Board of Directors, many of whom are venture capitalists with extensive experience in early stage companies, decided to pilot the program for three years to test the effectiveness and scalability of the model.

Therefore, the first three pilot classes between 2004 and 2007 were comprised of only seven students each, the staff was completely volunteer based, and the annual budget remained below \$15,000. During this pilot phase, the Board of Directors and Founders monitored results, evaluated program processes, drafted the curriculum, and honed our organizational direction. In 2007 we knew it was time to expand.

Growing our Movement

During our first year of program expansion in 2007, US Empowered partnered with three new schools, expanding our incoming class size from seven to 31 students. In the 2008-2009 school year, US Empowered will partner with seven schools throughout Chicago, bringing our Fellowship base to more than 100 students. We plan to continue on this trajectory into the future. Because the pilot program focused disproportionate amounts of time and resources on the program strategy, curriculum development, and growth models, US Empowered can feasibly scale our proven model at a rapid rate of expansion. A detailed expansion plan is outlined below:

	Pilot Program			Initial Expansion			
	'04-'05	'05-'06	'06-'07	'07-'08	'08-'09	'09-'10	'10-'11
Cities	1 - Chicago						2
Schools	1	1	1	3	7	13	18
Y1 Fellows: Juniors	7	7	-	31	72	156	216
Y2 Fellows: Seniors	-	7	7	4	31	72	156
Y3 Fellows: College Freshman	-	-	7	7	4	31	72
Students in College	-	-	-	14	18	49	121
Total Students Empowered	7	14	14	49	121	270	462

US Empowered has also grown its staff since Jeff Nelson, the founding Executive Director, joined the movement in March 2007. New to the executive team are Scott Goldner, Chief Program Officer and Abbey Lerner, Chief Development Officer. Scott began his career as a high school math teacher before founding Discovery High School in the Bronx. He served as Principal of Discovery until joining US Empowered. Abbey comes to US Empowered with a degree in Finance from the University of Michigan Business School and was a 2006 Teach for America Corps Member in a south-side Chicago school. They are sure to energize our work and efforts as we move forward.

“The impact that US Empowered has had on Corliss [High School] is immeasurable. Not only are our Fellows excited about preparing for college, but their energy has begun to spread to their peers as more students realize that their hard work and preparation now can lead to postsecondary success down the road.”

*Lindsey Rohwer,
Teacher, Corliss
High School*

Our Vision of the Future

In the short-term, US Empowered provides a concrete model of support and resources to teams of students in low-income schools, promoting the achievement of quantifiable measures of success. In the long-term, US Empowered works to shift the paradigm of expectations in our partnership schools and districts so that the entire student body sees higher education as an achievable option following high school graduation.

As our movement grows and the success of our Fellows spreads, we envision a time when principals, district leaders, and local government agencies see exactly what resources and support services need to be in place in all low-income schools to begin to close the college divide citywide. At this critical juncture, US Empowered will be able to expand its breadth of impact on a heightened scale so that thousands of students can benefit from our program model.

One Student’s Story: Chris Pegues

US Empowered boasts successful statistics, 100 percent college acceptance and attendance rates, 96 percent attendance rates for US Empowered sessions, etc. In addition to the large scale impact US Empowered has on groups of students and schools, US Empowered also transforms the lives of individual students. Chris is just one of these students.

US Empowered does not admit Fellows based on prior academic performance, but based on Five Leadership Qualities: professionalism, ambition, integrity, resourcefulness, and resilience. Prior to US Empowered, Chris did not see the reason to try to achieve in high school. He speaks of his school history saying, “to cope with problems at home and in school, during my early teens, I began to give into peer pressure as my friends all had.” Born to a mother on drugs and a father incarcerated, Chris notes that after getting in fights in school, witnessing constant violence, and running away from his legal guardian, no one was left to care about him. He recounts failing freshman and sophomore English in high school. He then applied to US Empowered, and everything began to change. Before US Empowered his GPA was a 2.67. Just one semester later, it was 3.57. His ACT score also jumped by four points! Chris goes on to explain that it is not that he couldn’t do the work before, but even if he got good grades, he couldn’t see how it would change his future.

Chris now says, “I’ve experienced a great share of struggle throughout my life. Struggle with family, struggle with friends, and struggle with school. US Empowered, to me, is the solution to struggle.” Going into this senior year at South Shore High School, he now talks about his desire to go to the University of Illinois or Southeastern Louisiana University. He will write college admissions essays about his plans to start a new business, teaching children to compose artwork as a form of therapy.

“I was always sure I had the ability to go to college” he says, “but now, I know for a fact I’m going and I know exactly how to get there.” Chris will be arriving on a college campus less than one year from now.

US Empowered 2008 Supporters

Thank you! We are immeasurably grateful to all of the supporters who make our movement possible. The foundations, corporations, and individuals listed below have helped build and expand our movement through their commitments, generosity, and vision. Each day, their donations make higher education a reality for a growing number of deserving students from urban communities.

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