



What is STEP-UP FLEX?

STEP-UP FLEX (Summer Teacher Education Partnership for Urban Preparation, First Look EXperience) is a one-week pre-student teaching fellowship, community internship, and summer residency program for teacher education majors at Illinois State University. STEP-UP FLEX is one component of the Chicago, Decatur, and Peoria Teacher Education Pipelines and is funded by the URBAN CENTER (Using Research Based Actions to Network Cities Engaged in New Teacher Education Reform) Project under the Office of Innovation at the US Department of Education.

Students who are selected for STEP-UP FLEX (STEP-UP FLEX Fellows) live in Chicago, Decatur or Peoria in a partner neighborhood where they participate in a rigorous 1-week program. During the program, Fellows observe in Chicago Public School (CPS), Decatur Public School (DPS) or Peoria Public School (PPS) classrooms during summer school, explore each urban center through community excursions, engage in deep reflection about urban teaching through seminars and workshops taught by ISU faculty/staff, CPS, DPS and PPS teachers/administrators and community activists, and participate in other civically engaged activities Chicago, Decatur and Peoria.

STEP-UP FLEX has a strong focus on the role community plays in education and the ways in which teachers are a part of the greater community effort toward improving the quality of life for all residents. STEP-UP FLEX provides an opportunity for pre-service teachers to live with residents in the community and learn from their experiences with the schools and how teachers can engage the community in their classroom. STEP-UP FLEX provides Fellows an experience to explore the assets of Chicago, Decatur and Peoria. It is the best way to prepare to become a Chicago Public School, Decatur Public School or Peoria Public School teacher and gain experience to apply for the 4-week STEP-UP Fellowship.

When is STEP-UP?

In Summer 2018, STEP-UP FLEX Decatur will run from June 9th – June 15th. STEP-UP Decatur is open to all teacher education majors.

In Summer 2018, STEP-UP FLEX Peoria will run from June 16th – June 22nd. STEP-UP Peoria is open to all teacher education majors.

In Summer 2018, STEP-UP FLEX Chicago will run from July 21st – July 27th. STEP-UP Chicago is open to all teacher education majors.

Updated: September 8, 2017 (Miller)

Who is eligible for STEP-UP FLEX 2018?

All current teacher education students who are freshmen and sophomores are welcome to apply to STEP-UP FLEX. Juniors will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Any other requirements?

All applicants must complete the STEP-UP application and submit it by the deadline and complete a panel interview with select members of STEP-UP personnel, community partners, and district teachers.

Do I receive a stipend?

In addition to the program being offered at no cost to the Fellow, a living wage stipend of \$500 will be provided. This stipend can be used for anything and is provided in place of a summer job. Fellows are not permitted to work during the program.

When will I be paid?

Stipends will be paid to students upon satisfactory completion of the program. Payment is typically received within 1 month of completing the program.

What is my commitment beyond the program?

There is no commitment beyond the program. We hope that STEP-UP FLEX Fellows who apply for STEP-UP the following year, student teach in Chicago, Decatur or Peoria and eventually work in Chicago, Decatur or Peoria as a public school teacher.

Where will I live?

All Fellows will live with host families in a traditional home stay arrangement. Fellows will live alone or in some cases in pairs with community members who have been selected as a host home by the project staff. To provide participants with an authentic community living experience, STEP-UP FLEX Fellows will live in the community in which they are placed for their teaching and service. Fellows *cannot* select or choose in which community, school, or community-based organization they will be placed.

Chicago communities:**Little Village neighborhood (partnership with ISU established in 2005)**

Little Village is a vibrant, culturally rich and diverse community on Chicago's south west side. Home to 91,000 of Chicago's residents, this neighborhood provides an excellent experience for urban teachers because it has the largest concentration of CPS schools for any one community and has the youngest population in the city, with a median age of 16. ISU has worked in Little Village since 2005 and has developed collaborative partnerships with many of the neighborhood leaders and organizations.

Auburn Gresham neighborhood (partnership with ISU established in 2010)

Auburn Gresham is one of the South Side's best-kept secrets. It is home to many of Chicago's famous brick bungalows as well as Auburn Park and its "chain of lakes" surrounded by Winneconna Parkway, a hidden gem of green space. It is a vibrant African American community with a population of 56,000 Chicago residents. Auburn Gresham is home to the Faith Community of St. Sabina and Reverend Michael Pflieger. Auburn Gresham brings their long history of advocating for social justice and innovation to promote community change to the table, making it a perfect community to complement your teacher training.

Albany Park neighborhood (partnership with ISU established in 2012)

Albany Park is Chicago's most ethnically diverse neighborhood, and one of the most diverse in the United States. It has one of the highest percentages of foreign-born residents in Chicago. The majority of residents hail from Latin America, Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. Over 40 different languages are spoken in the Chicago Public Schools. Albany Park has long been a port of entry for immigrants and continues to be a springboard to the middle class for new families and entrepreneurs.

East Garfield Park neighborhood (partnership with ISU established in 2014)

East Garfield Park is a true Westside gem! It is home to the Garfield Park Conservatory, one of the largest and most impressive conservatories in the United States. Community amenities include accessible public transit, numerous garden clubs, art galleries, a Fresh Market Food Pantry, and medical clinic to name a few. This community works to build a healthy education pipeline for the children of East Garfield Park with new opportunities, wrap-around services and more. Many of our partner Chicago public schools have a School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) of Level 1 or 1+ keeping its accountability status high. This vibrant community of mainly African American residents continues to thrive in multiple areas to enhance growth and solidify the future. East Garfield Park seeks to become a place where success becomes the norm and families prosper, making it the perfect place to be in your teaching journey.

Pilsen neighborhood (partnership with ISU established in 2015)

Pilsen is traditionally recognized as the largest community of Mexican Americans in Chicago. Located in the lower west side of Chicago, Pilsen is home to the National Museum of Mexican Art, the only Latino museum accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. Throughout the neighborhood, one can see the rich culture through the Aztec calendars, Plaza de los Heroes, and many iconic murals. A neighborhood known for remarkable food, location, and art, Pilsen remains loyal to its Mexican American and Latino roots. With events like the Day of the Dead Run, the Children's Day Parade, and many others there is a great sense of pride and community in Pilsen – pride expressed through the local schools and community engagement that are inspiring.

Decatur community:

Decatur Community (partnership with ISU established in 2014)

Otherwise known as the “Soybean Capital of the World,” Decatur is located in central Illinois between Springfield and Champaign. Decatur has historically been a manufacturing town with big companies like Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), Tate & Lyle, and Caterpillar being among the largest employers. Recently, Decatur has been undergoing a progressive transformation through a community-led effort to make Decatur a better place to work and live. “Grow Decatur” is leveraging community assets for workforce development, enhanced educational opportunities, lakefront expansion, and improved housing in the city. The momentum from the movement has resulted in a renovated downtown and recognition that Decatur’s diverse population is its strength.

Peoria community:

Peoria Community (partnership with ISU established in 2017)

Located in the heart of Illinois, Peoria was established in 1691 and is the oldest European settlement in Illinois. It is also the largest city on the Illinois River with 114,265 residents (2016) and is midway between Chicago and St. Louis. Peoria is a city that cares as evidenced by the many agencies and organizations working to improve the community and the quality of life of its residents.

What are the expectations of the host families?

Host families will be engaged throughout the program. In addition to providing clean and reliable housing to STEP-UP FLEX Fellows, the families will have dinner at home with the Fellows a few times per week and participate in additional meetings and celebrations related to the program. Each Fellow will have their own room in the home.

How are host families selected?

Host families undergo a rigorous selection process implemented by our community partners. Each community identifies trusted families that have strong ties to the community and ISU’s partner community-based organization. The selection process includes home visits and interviews with potential host families before careful selections are made. Host family arrangements range from young professionals to families with school-aged children to elderly “empty nesters”. Host families are valuable community scholars with rich histories that they want to share with you.

What are the expectations of the students staying with host families?

All STEP-UP FLEX Fellows will adhere to a common Code of Conduct provided by the program. In addition to this Code of Conduct, STEP-UP FLEX Fellows and host families will work together to create an individualized "contract" outlining the rules, expectations, and procedures unique to both the family's and Fellow's needs. We expect all Fellows to respect the household norms and expectations of the host family. Also, you will be expected to have dinner a few times per week with the host family.

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What is the schedule like?

During the one-week program, STEP-UP FLEX Fellows will spend most mornings in a summer school classroom, afternoons in the community, and evenings in special seminars and classes, spending time with your host family, or community-based or full cohort reflective seminars. The daily schedule is rigorous (approximately from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day) and rewarding.

Will I have any free time?

Fellows are encouraged to spend any “down time” with their host families, making time to reflect on their experiences together, or prepare for the next day ahead. In order to complete the fully immersive program, Fellows are not permitted to accept visitations or “meet-up” with anyone outside the program—this includes the Fellow’s family, friends, and/or significant others during the program.

What will my in-classroom experience be like?

From morning to early afternoon, STEP-UP FLEX Fellows will observe in a summer school setting based in the community in which they are living. STEP-UP FLEX Fellows may have an opportunity to teach a lesson at some point during the week.

What kind of classes, seminars and special sessions will I take?

STEP-UP FLEX Fellows take rigorous coursework aimed at preparing high-need educators for Chicago, Decatur and Peoria Public Schools. Topics may include Response to Intervention, Universal Design for Learning, literacy training, content relevant pedagogy seminars, power and privilege, Restorative Justice, and community contextualization. Special sessions include reflective meetings, outings, and other immersive events. Professional development meetings such as job fairs, meet and greets with CPS/DPS/PPS leadership, and resume workshops will also be included.

Who teaches my classes, seminars and special sessions?

Instructors will include current CPS, DPS and PPS teachers and administrators, some of whom are ISU graduates and former Fellows; community educators, activists, and organizers from ISU’s partner organizations; and ISU faculty/staff. We also view each host family member as a community scholar and as such, STEP-UP FLEX Fellows should take advantage of their time at home and learn with and from their host families.

Who else is in the program?

A cohort of education students will be selected from ISU to participate in STEP-UP FLEX. In addition to cooperating teachers, community-based organization supervisors, and seminar instructors, a full-time STEP-UP FLEX staff member will be available to coordinate and support STEP-UP FLEX Fellows while in Chicago, Decatur and Peoria.

When will I find out if my summer 2018 application is accepted?

Applications will be reviewed by the selection committee comprised of university faculty, staff, community members, and district teachers in preparation for interviews. All dates can be found in the STEP-UP application once you select the program that you want to apply for.

Email Matthew Miller at mrmille@ilstu.edu if you have any questions.