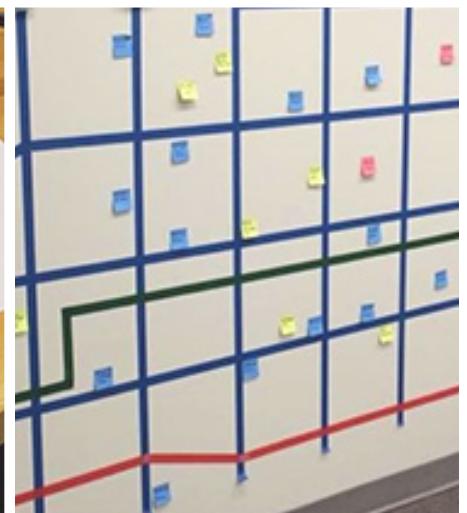


Undergraduate Research

by Gabriel Conners

at Illinois Tech

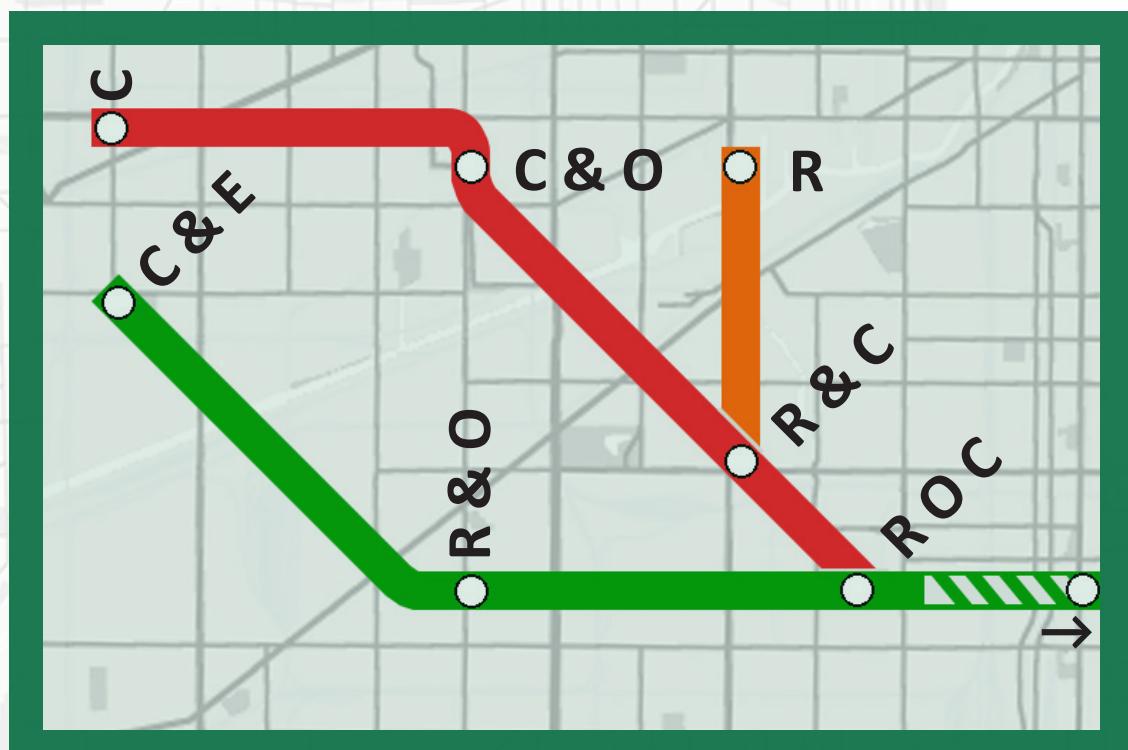
2014 - 2018



System Map

1

2	O	Orientation
3	C	Creativity
4	C & O	Creativity & Ownership
5	R	Relationship
6	R & C	Relationship & Creativity
7	C & E	Creativity & Equity
8	R & O	Relationship & Ownership
9	R O C	Relationship, Ownership, Creativity
10-11	→	...So What?



Through a blend of theoretical and applied research, we will discover a goal-framework of relationship, ownership, and creative capacity, finally arriving at a heart-centered strategy for equitable community development.



Why Illinois Tech?

Interdisciplinary experiential learning, an applied emphasis, and a near-South Side Chicago location drew me to Illinois Tech.

Prior to my admittance, I had been meditating on the necessity of civic education that immersed students in problem solving with their communities. In attending Illinois Tech, I had the privilege of prototyping this approach through my own learning.

Layout

This portfolio models my undergraduate research as a **system**, with each thematic component demonstrated as a node within a larger structure of inquiry.

Process

My process begins with a vision of a just society.

While the inquiries are more inter-nested than sequential, my research plotted a path through three basic components:

- R | Relationships as critical to growth
- O | Equity of access by way of ownership of process or assets
- C | An idea-centric “creativity as currency”

I **Invite** you to meditate on what these ideas might mean in the context of your communities and, should you desire, to find my contact information on the final page so that we may extend this engagement into a conversation.

My mind and heart are open.



How does creativity influence community development?

By the time I began studies in 2014, I had become fascinated with systems that unite people in creative endeavors. With half a decade of facilitating and witnessing creative collisions as a coffee barista, I was wondering:

If we were to imagine a new layer added to the economy, across which creativity could flow freely—how might that layer connect disparate sectors and siloed peoples?



City of Chicago Fulton Market Innovation District Plan, 2014

Research

Innovation Districts Fall '14

Are “innovation district” designations effective tools for economic development?

- Secondary research
- Literary analysis

Findings

The jury is out on the impact of “innovation district” designations. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these districts attract investment, but given the tendency for innovation districts to represent an unbridled nod to gentrification, I must ask:

Who has ownership of the development process and who is benefiting?



How can creativity translate into socially just ownership?

Having grown up in a homogenous country-side of Oklahoma, the reality of segregation was foreign to me.

After living in Denver and Chicago and witnessing racist structures and behavior, I began asking how economic platforms might **bring equity where it is most needed**.

Research

Microfinance Spring '15

Does microfinance promote human development?

- Secondary research
- Literary analysis

Crowdfunding Spring '15

Is equity crowdfunding viable for small businesses in low income communities?

- Problem Identification
- Goal Framing
- Quantitative Analysis
- Political Feasibility Analysis

Policy Category	Current Status
Encourage Small Business Growth	Access to Capital
	Shareability of Security Offering
	Admin Costs re: Offering
Improve Fiscal Health	Annual Job Creation
	Low Socio/Econ Local Wealth Multiplier
	Efficient Clearing of Startup Capital S/D Market
Protect Investors (Unsophisticated)	Unsophisticated Investor Ability to Hold Equity
	Money Lost to Failed Investment
	Money Lost to Fraud (Millions)
Improve Social Wellbeing	Democratic Expression through Investment
	Communities Ability to Retain Skill and Talent
	Current Status

From a Comparative Analysis of Crowdfunding Policies, G.C. 2015

Findings

While microfinance and crowdfunding were compelling models for translating creativity into ownership of wealth, they were **not proving to be resilient drivers of socio-economic equity**.

The research suggested that sustainable, just efficiency required a coordinated alignment of values within and across the target community. **Another layer was needed, one that would leverage relationships.**



How is opportunity revealed through relationships?

Community dominated my extracurricular activity; from the residence halls to the collegiate entrepreneurship communities around Chicago, I sought ways to bring people together. This curiosity naturally surfaced in insights from my research...

Research

I & E Landscape Canvas Spring '15, Team

What is the landscape of innovation and entrepreneurship opportunities at Illinois Tech?

- Stakeholder Interviews
- Secondary Research
- Data Coding and Analysis

International Student Impact Spring '17

What is the economic impact on Cook County of the 2016 international student body of Illinois Tech?

- Secondary Research
- Quantitative Analysis with IMPLAN

Videography Spring '15, Team

How can we employ videography to build a stronger campus community?

- User-Centered Design Methods
- Problem Research and Definition
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Videography and Video Editing

MACRO VIEW: 50,000 ft. View of Innovation & Entrepreneurship

Institutional I&E	Offering Name	Department	Contact
Certificate Programs or Concentrations	IT Entrepreneurship and Management Specialization	IIT School of Applied Technology Information Technology and Management	Mario Kozi; mkozi@iit.edu
Certificate Programs or Concentrations	Information Technology Innovation, Leadership and Entrepreneurship Certificate (Graduate)	IIT School of Applied Technology Office of Professional Development	Nilda Cinco; cincn@iit.edu
Minors Offered	Entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurship Academy	nrokop@stuart.iit.edu
Research Centers	IIT Research Institute (IITRI)	Research	David McCormick
Research Centers	Center for Innovation and Science and Applications (CISA)	Research	Bob Carlson; carlbo@iit.edu
Research Centers	The Pritzker Institute of Biomedical Science and Engineering	Research	Vincent Turitto; 312-563-3000
Research Centers	Wanger Institute for Sustainable Energy Research (WISER)	Research	Peg Murphy; murphy@iit.edu
		School of Applied Technology, Amour College of Engineering,	

From Landscape Canvas of IIT, 2015, Based on Wenger Model

Findings

Relationships, such as regular communication, exchange, trust, and collaboration, are critical to revealing and enabling opportunities for people-centered development.



Is creativity a function of social connectedness?

Understanding that relationships helped build community, I asked: can relationships facilitate creativity?

Research

Social Capital Fall '14

How does social capital relate to creativity within the student body?

- Qualitative surveying
- Response Coding
- Quantitative Analysis

ideaXchange Spring '16

How can students self-organize to solve challenges together?

- Stakeholder Research
- Participant Recruiting/Marketing
- Experience Design
- Event Facilitation

Exploratory Forum Spring '16, Team

How can we create a neighborhood forum for social innovation?

- User-Centered Design Methods
- Problem Research and Definition
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Experience Design

Chinatown Youth Spring '18, Team

How can Illinois Tech students improve civic education outcomes in Chinatown youth?

- Interviews (Group & 1:1)
- Feasibility Analysis
- Goal Framing
- Budget and Grant Writing

Findings

Creative Capacity within a community is unlocked with collaboration and social capital, so a **relationship-centric perspective** is necessary to plan for equitable capacity building.



Ideas for Donuts, an ideaXchange prototype, G.C. 2016



Is creativity a social justice issue? How can we grow creative equity?

When I came to Illinois Tech, I thought my challenge was to build resource networks to empower communities to sustainably develop themselves.

I learned that I was making a host of assumptions-- the problem reaches deeper:

Communities must first have the liberty to design themselves, to discover their intent and bring it to life.

Research

Neighborhood Reinvention Spring '18

How has the past century and a half of Bronzeville history conveyed the theme of reinvention?

- Secondary Research
- Literary Analysis

Freedom to Design Spring '18

How much of a privilege is the freedom to design?

- Literary Research and Critical Analysis

Findings

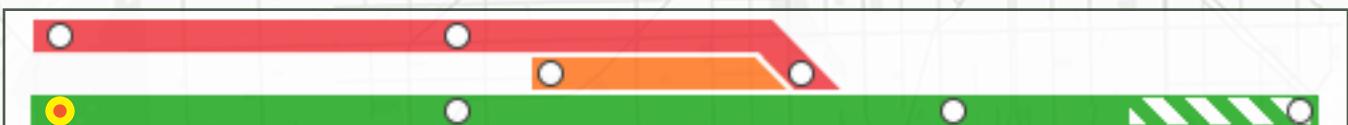
Communities are designed in a process governed by those with creative capacity.

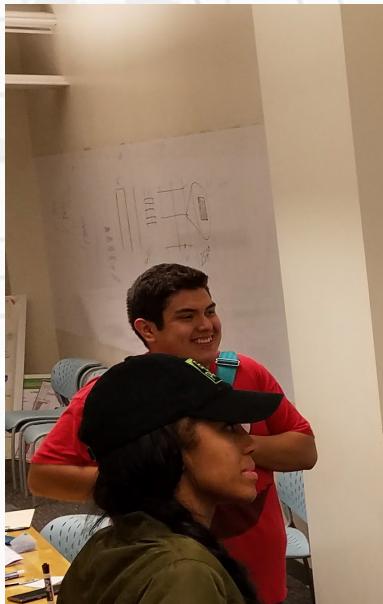
This capacity is a function of resilient relationships and ownership. Women, People of Color, and poor and disenfranchised people are marginalized from accessing and exercising creative capital due to relational breakdowns in their communities and exclusion from process and asset ownership.

The path toward just communities depends on building relational foundations that weave people together with opportunities in ways that ensure process and asset ownership—so the community becomes empowered to sustainably create (itself.)

"The fallacy of assuming the world is just is that we are all active agents in this world, we co-design this reality and our action or inaction has direct effects on the nature of outcomes others receive. Our task in achieving a shared freedom to design must then involve the open critique of these mental constructs."

From "Freedom to Design," G.C. 2018





What does it look like when ownership is layered over a relational network?

Research

Outreach Fall '16, Team

How might we design a new social enterprise rooted in Chicago that will produce direct economic and social value for local businesses?

- Problem Definition
- Asset Mapping
- Stakeholder Research & Interviews
- Service Prototype Design

Findings

While individual organizations faced challenges in reaching their market, there was opportunity to combine marketing resources through shared ownership. Collective response to a challenge is synergistic when people are connected and have ownership.

The power of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.



What does a thriving, self-actualizing community look like?

Research

Idea Marketplace Fall '16, Team

How can students design and schedule experiential learning courses?

- Project Management
- Stakeholder Research
- Wireframing
- Videography

Developing Equity Spring '15

How can community development grow social and economic equity?

- Secondary Research
- Literary Analysis

Cafe as Systems Change Fall '15

How does front-end retail serve broader economic sustainability transitions?

- Stakeholder Interviews
- Strategic Niche Management Analysis
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Experience Design

Pegasus Spring '16, Team

How can equity crowdfunding respond to wealth inequality?

- Feasibility Analysis
- Goal Framing
- Business Model Planning

Findings

Establishing thriving communities depends primarily on the quality of relationships that exist within that community.

The community must have ownership of the process; be it wealth or other forms, the community must have control over the mechanisms for growth, and must be connected in a way where they can fruitfully organize.

On this foundation, a community can gain and exercise creativity capacity to guide equitable, just development.

Relationships, Ownership, and Creative Capacity are central to the formula of equity.



The theme of “co-X” arose again and again throughout my undergraduate research, volunteerism, and work: Collaboration, cooperative ownership, collective action—community.

This connectedness allows ideas and resources to flow and unlocks a synergy: the whole is greater than the sum of parts.

Creative capacity is needed for a community to grow in knowledge and understanding, to discover new ways of overcoming challenges and to find collective joy in the expression of our uniquely human creative spirit.

The purer the quality of relationships among a community become, the more effective and sustainable their work will be. A community with patience and kindness, a community that trusts, hopes, and perseveres together will undoubtedly reap the most sustainable rewards. Love grows trust and respects others, shares power, and celebrates creativity.

There is, then, something to be said for understanding how love can be infused into the designs, programs, and policies of community development. Relationships, Ownership, and Creative Capacity are the ROCC of just development, when love is at the core.

“The failure of our systems ... is a problem of design.”

Heart-Centered Design and Strategy

ROCC emerged from my research as a type of goal-framework for understanding and designing resiliant community programs and policies. I am convinced that the insights here are of little worth without an infusion of deeper values into the process: a focus on the heart.

The failure of our systems, be it 1:1 relationships, student organizations, university-community relations, or the ability of an economy to foster equity of access to all people, is a problem of design. There is a reason why human-centered design methodologies are successful at rendering relevant and powerful outcomes for their target population--it is because the story and situated meaning of target users is incorporated into the earliest stages of the design process; each decision is framed from the perspective of the user.

Heart-centered design provokes us to consider how our program and policy design process is in touch with the reality of those whom it is meant to serve, such that they are valued, honored, invited, encouraged, and built-up at each stage of the design. The end result should minister directly to their situation, reflecting values of heart through each interaction with the product/service/policy.



Heart-centered design and strategy must be the core of my next research. What does it look like when this approach and the goals of relationship, ownership, and creative capacity are applied to specific organizational and community challenges? How can we understand this at the birds-eye and the worms-eye view?

Invitation to Contribute

I am deeply grateful for your time and perspective.

If you have any contributions that may strengthen the direction of this work, or if you would like to explore what these ideas might mean for your own communities and work, I invite you to reach out to me at:

Gabriel.Conners@gmail.com
+1 (312) 434 - 9260



My residents in Fall 2015, my favorite community!

Gratitudes

The work represented here is a collective effort of faith, relationships, curiosities, ideas, and causes that stretch far beyond me. My primary responsibility is to actively steward the wisdom that has been shared with me.

I thank my family for helping me to understand and define my core values of love—foundational to my work.

I thank the mentors and friends I have found in Cara Carter, Deb Kerr, Lisa Montgomery, Jerry Doyle, Nik Rokop, Maryam Heidaripour, Humera Fasihud-din, Raed Elaydi, Brandon and Amanda Neely, Shavonn Nowlin, Jeremy Alexis, Mark Pawloski, and Matthew Hoffmann—all of whom have challenged my perspective and shared with me new ways of thinking.

I especially thank Rebecca Steffenson, Daniel Bliss, Yuri Mansury, Matthew Shapiro, and Jonathan Rosenburg –faculty of my department of Social Sciences—for helping to shape my understanding of public policy.

Finally, I thank all of my peers and staff at Illinois Tech—who collectively provided the community of inspiration and opportunity to converse, discover, and experiment toward the understanding I have today. - G.C.

