Oakton College

Spring 2025

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As part of your final assignment for your role as an Education Advocacy Research Assistant with the Chicago Education Advocacy Cooperative, you will respond to five reflection questions that explore the outreach, advocacy, and research work you completed between January and June 2025. Your responses should demonstrate a thoughtful engagement with your experiences supporting migrant and refugee families, organizing community resources, and contributing to data-driven research projects. For each question, write one well-developed paragraph that includes specific examples, personal insights, and connections to broader themes such as educational equity, mutual aid, career readiness, and the ethical use of data. You are encouraged to reflect on both the challenges and moments of growth you experienced, how your understanding of advocacy and community work has evolved, and how this opportunity has shaped your personal goals, values, and future direction. Your reflection will be evaluated based on your ability to clearly describe your involvement in family support efforts, articulate your role in at least one of the ChiEAC research studies, and meaningfully connect this experience to your learning, skill development, and commitment to social impact. Please submit your completed responses as a single document to the D2L assignment folder titled "ChiEAC Research Assistant Reflection" by the posted deadline.

**Education Advocacy Research Assistant**  
Chicago Education Advocacy Cooperative (ChiEAC) — Chicago, IL  
*January 2025 – June 2025*

* Provided direct outreach and educational support to 18 low-income migrant and refugee families across Chicago, assisting with CPS enrollment, translation services, special education referrals, and access to culturally responsive academic resources.
* Collected and distributed over 500 pounds of donated clothing and winter gear to meet the immediate needs of newly arrived families and raised more than $2,000 for ChiEAC’s 2025 Community Impact Fund to support emergency assistance and microgrants.
* Collaborated with ChiEAC staff and peer volunteers to contribute to three independent community-based studies, used Qualtrics and mobile outreach strategies to collect, clean, and organize over 300 unique data points across the three projects (see below) while ensuring all responses met ChiEAC’s internal ethical standards.
  + *Study 1*: Surveyed attitudes toward career readiness and barriers to job searching among low-income students and caregivers.
  + *Study 2*: Collected survey data exploring public perceptions of the value of a college degree, particularly within first-generation immigrant families.
  + *Study 3*: Supported digital survey distribution for a project on community attitudes toward artificial intelligence, data privacy, and automation in everyday life.
* Represented ChiEAC in my community,, building trust with families and advocating for access to trauma-informed, bilingual, and equity-focused educational supports.

**Education Advocacy Research Assistant** *Reflection Questions*

* What did serving migrant and refugee families teach you about trust, advocacy, and the barriers that families face when trying to access basic educational resources in Chicago? Reflect on specific moments of challenge or growth and consider how this experience shaped your understanding of educational equity.
* Although I didn’t work directly with migrant and refugee families, being a part of a team or class that supported them helped me see just how much trust matters in advocacy work. I learned that many families faced layers of barriers, such as language difference, legal concerns,housing instabilities, and unfamiliarity with western school system, all of which can make something as basic as enrolling a child in school feel overwhelmingwhat stood out to me most was how often families hesitate to ask for help, not because they don't need it, but because past experiences have taught them that systems won't respond with care.
* How did your role in collecting and distributing clothing, raising funds, and organizing community support shift the way you understand mutual aid and grassroots organizing? What emotions or insights came up for you as you took on responsibility for meeting urgent needs in real time?
* Helping to raise funds with my class gave me a new understanding of what mutual aid means. Before this experience, I thought of fundraising as mostly a way for organizations to collect money for a good cause. But being involved in organizing efforts that directly supported families made it feel much more personal and urgent. We weren’t raising money for some abstract idea, but we were trying to meet real needs in real time. That changed how I saw my role. I wasn’t just a student helping out, but I was a part of something bigger, a group of people coming together to support our community with whatever we could offer. After this experience, it made me realize that grassroots organizing doesn’t have to be big or perfect; it just has to be rooted in care and action. This experience showed me that mutual aid is about solidarity, not charity, and that small efforts can make a big difference when people work together.
* Of the three research studies you contributed to, which one resonated most with your personal story or the stories of people you know? How did participating in this research project impact the way you view the role of data in shaping public understanding and policy?
* The study that stayed with me the most was the one involving career readiness and the struggles low income students and caregivers face when looking for jobs. I chose this study because I saw parts of my own story in it. Growing up, I watched certain people work hard just to keep things going, sometimes two jobs, and still not have access to the kinds of careers they wanted. Even for students who did everything they were supposed to, it was still hard to figure out how to move forward. Being involved in this research helped me understand how those everyday challenges can be seen in data. But more than that, it showed me how data can be used to speak up for people who aren’t always heard. This project helped me see that data isn’t just numbers, but it’s about making sure real experiences lead to real change. It made me more committed to using research as a way to support fairness and opportunity for communities like mine.
* How did this experience challenge or confirm what you believed about the power of community organizations in addressing complex issues like job searching, educational access, and technology in daily life? What do you now see as the strengths and limitations of this kind of work?
* Before this experience, I believed that community organizations had the heart to make a difference, but I didn’t always see how they could take on big problems like job access, education, and tech. After working with this organization, I saw how much these groups really operate. They may not have all the money or power, but they have strong relationships with the people they serve, and that matters. That kind of trust can't be bought, and it’s what gives this work its strength. At the same time, I also learned that good intentions can only go so far without enough support or funding. After this experience, it made me believe more in the power of local work, even when the system feels too big or too fixed.
* Looking back at your time with ChiEAC, how do you think this experience shaped your personal goals, sense of purpose, or vision for the future? What skills or perspectives do you hope to carry forward—and how do you hope to keep supporting others?
* Looking back on my time, I can say it helped me to see the future more clearly. Before, I knew I wanted to make a difference, but I didn’t fully understand what it could look like. Being part of this work gave me a more front row seat to what real support and advocacy mean. I saw how listening, patience, and conscience can change lives in small but powerful ways. It made me realize I want to keep working in spaces where proper care is being left out or left behind. Whether it’s in education, housing, or access to tech, I want to be someone who can help close the gap. I'm leaving this experience with stronger communication skills,a better understanding of how to work across culture, and a deeper respect for the roles that trust plays in community work. Most of all, iv’r learned that supporting others doesn't always mean all the answers, it means showing up, being curious, and being willing to learn.

| **Category** | **Criteria** | **Points Possible** |
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| **Reflection on Community Engagement**  How well you reflect on your outreach, advocacy, and family support work. | * Describe specific examples of working with migrant or refugee families (e.g., CPS enrollment, translation, special education support) * Explains the challenges families face and how the student responded or adapted * Demonstrates an understanding of cultural relevance, language access, and trauma-informed care | /20 |
| **Reflection on Research and Data Collection**  How well you explain the data collection and contribution to the three ChiEAC studies. | * Clearly identifies and reflects on their role in at least one of the three research projects * Explains the importance of the topic and how data was gathered (e.g., survey, outreach, digital tools) * Describes how the research helped inform their view of issues like career readiness, college access, or AI in society | /15 |
| **Personal Growth and Future Impact**  How well you connect your experience to your own learning, values, and goals | * Reflects on how the experience shaped their understanding of advocacy, education, or community work * Identifies specific skills gained (e.g., communication, trust-building, organizing, ethical data handling) * Describes how this experience will influence their future studies, career, or community involvement | /15 |