

METROSquash: Using Work-Study to Connect to Something Meaningful

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Class ends and students hustle to grab their rackets, finish their drills, and meet their coaches on the squash court in Henry Crown Field House. They can be seen running laps with high-knees, doing lunges, and practicing squash in small groups. However, these students grabbing their rackets and practicing for their upcoming competitions are not from UChicago; rather they are middle and high school students from the South Side.

METROSquash, established in 2005, is an afterschool program for middle and high school students, which focuses on squash, academic tutoring, and preparation for high school and college. It follows the model of similar programs, particularly on the east coast. Squash is not just the hook to get students involved; it encourages sportsmanship, inter-school friendships, and physical activity among the students.

METROSquash is a long-standing partner of UCSC's Off-Campus Federal Work-Study Program. The program connects work study eligible students with approximately forty different Chicago-area nonprofits, schools, and government agencies for substantive work that supports local communities. Opportunities are geared toward the interests and skills of College and graduate students. With METROSquash, UChicago students use work-study funds to tutor, mentor, and provide supplemental academic support for their students.

Clarissa, a high school sophomore, started METROSquash in 8th grade. She is a first-generation immigrant. When the process of applying to high schools came around she and her family relied heavily on friends and teachers for help. Some friends told her about METROSquash, so she tried out and joined the team. "Squash is a really good sport with big opportunities, and not a lot of people play," she says. Clarissa hopes to continue playing squash at a college level.

Along with the improvement in squash and competition skills, one of the program's primary goals is to place students into high schools and colleges that match their needs and interests. To date, METROSquash has helped place 49 students in high schools and to access over \$1,000,000 in scholarships. This year, the program is working to help their first class of 12th grade students prepare for standardized tests, visit colleges, and write applications.

METROSquash partners with UChicago for both academic support and athletic facilities. Squash practice takes place in Henry Crown, while the tutoring program is housed at the University Church on 57th and University. As they continue to grow, METROSquash is raising funds for their own building. They hope to continue the partnership with UChicago, returning the favor by allowing the University's men's squash team and the Lab School to use METROSquash's future facility.

David Kay, Executive Director of METROSquash says, “The Federal Work Study program is the cornerstone of METROSquash. It reinforces the idea of college for our students, and the breadth of knowledge that the tutors have, whether it’s a language or in math or reading, really expands our reach.”

Kay came to Chicago to provide leadership for METROSquash in 2005. Since then, he has seen many transformative impacts on the middle and high school students. According to Kay, the program gives young students confidence, cultural awareness, and a new desire to see the world as they travel across the country for competitions.

“[The students] begin to realize that through their hard work they can access anything. It is a very powerful message,” says Kay.

Kay also believes the program is beneficial to UChicago and its students. By building individual relationships with younger students and their families, UChicago tutors are helping bridge the gap between the community and the University. “Community involvement is a necessity,” says Kay. “Students come to college to learn about the world; and real life and real problems surround the University of Chicago.”

Izzy Rubin, a second-year in the College, began tutoring for the program last year. METROSquash has provided her with more than a work-study job. “It has made me feel connected to something meaningful and reinforced my desire to teach in the future,” she says. “[Being involved in METROSquash] definitely made me narrow down my goals.” And although Izzy serves as a tutor, she has learned lessons in perseverance and taking advantage of different opportunities from the younger students she works with.

METROSquash is always looking for more tutors – either work-study or as volunteers. To learn more about how to work at METROSquash or at other off-campus work-study sites, please visit: <https://studentemployment.uchicago.edu>.

- [UCSC’s Off-Campus Work-Study Program](#)
- [Student Employment Website](#) (for off-campus work-study jobs)
- [METROSquash](#)

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