“We are part of the fabric of Cincinnati. The city benefits from us, and we benefit from the city,” says Peter Landgren, interim senior vice president for academic affairs and provost at the University of Cincinnati (UC). That mutually beneficial relationship is most evident in UC’s 110-year-old co-operative program, recently renamed as the Experience-based Learning and Career Education Division.

Three UC colleges require cooperative work experience for certain undergraduate degrees, with opportunities offered by 1,800 participating employers. Co-op students can earn more than $10,000 per semester working for companies as diverse as Procter & Gamble, General Electric, and Macy’s. “We offer a ready workforce between the ages of 18 and 23, and many businesses recruit directly from the co-op program,” says Landgren, adding that 65 percent of UC’s co-op placements are local. “We’re finding that many people decide to stay around Cincinnati after they graduate.”

Another UC initiative that attracts students to the city is a diversity fellowship program offered in partnership with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. Funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the program brings to UC’s College-Conservatory of Music (CCM) graduate students from populations that are historically underrepresented in classical music. The students not only receive free tuition but also spend five weeks per year as full-time performers with the city’s symphony orchestra.

The arts also provided impetus for the Whiz Kids Music Program, which CCM launched in 2012 in partnership with Cincinnati’s City Gospel Mission. Conceived by UC alumni, the program brings music and theater activities into the City Gospel Mission’s after-school curriculum at underserved elementary schools; approximately 50 percent of Cincinnati’s public schools do not have music programs.

Student performance has improved at the public schools in which nearly 500 UC students serve as volunteer tutors. Through this Bearcat Buddies initiative, 60 percent of the elementary school students who participate experience a 10 percent gain in their reading and math skills.

UC sponsors a day of volunteer service to the local community and its honors program requires a set amount of community service hours. Landgren notes, “Our students understand that getting a degree can provide a higher earned income and help them be successful in life—but they also learn part of that success is how you impact others.”