



Latin School of Chicago Student Philanthropy Initiative

Outstanding Youth in Philanthropy Award | 2024 Annual Philanthropy Awards

Latin's Student Philanthropy Initiative (SPI) was the brainchild of two Latin students, Will Gomberg and Jackson Unikel. Intrigued by their own previous philanthropy exposure, they committed to delve more deeply into the grantmaking process and to research nonprofits in Uptown, one of Latin's community partners. Their goal of launching a student-run organization that was poised to thrive after their 2016 graduation was fully realized.

As part of their culminating Capstone project, Will and Jackson put together a program that included writing multiple units that explained step-by-step SPI's granting-making process. They took on the teaching of those steps while simultaneously providing the inaugural group of student leaders first-hand experience implementing the process. Together with Will and Jackson, the SPI students learned how to solicit donations, how to identify Uptown non-profits they could reach out to, how to read and evaluate grant applications, how to interview applicants during site visits, and how to make final selections. The initiative culminated in the selection of the Viola Project and Chicago Youth Programs for grants of \$1000 and \$5000 respectively.

During their Capstone presentation Will and Jackson gave the reps of Chicago Youth Programs a huge facsimile of their monetary award and noticeably delighted in finding worthy awardees. In turn the reps raved about their experience with SPI, letting the parents and students gathered in our theatre know not only how much the grant meant to them but praising our students for a process that included better questions than they got from most professional grant-making organizations. It was high praise but also a setup for great expectations. The bar for SPI was set high from the start.

The post-Unikel and Gomberg SPI groups met the challenge. They successfully continued to provide new members with a unique learning experience, expanded the number of organizations they reached out to, and upped funding to over \$20,00 annually. COVID changed some of the dynamics as site visits were suspended and interviews conducted via zoom. But the essentials remained the same.

"We want to change lives," Will and Jackson stated in 2016. And this is what SPI continues to do.