



Inspire Integrity Award

Applicant: Sarah Lee

Nomination: Bette Bottoms

How has the person you have nominated inspired you?

When I walked into the UIC Honors College Reception as a freshman, the first speech I heard came from Dean Bette Bottoms, who donned us with a warm welcome. Admittedly, I assumed that her motivational words would be the most interaction I would ever have with her. After all, I would not expect a dean—of the Honors College no less—to have the time or interest in becoming personally acquainted with hundreds of students.

But within just the year, Dean Bottoms would know my name—along with my major, career goal, and even my strengths and weaknesses as an individual. My close experience with Dean Bottoms is not alone—I quickly realized that countless students of all disciplines felt the same way when it came to forming a relationship with Dean Bottoms. As a junior in UIC, I have always been thankful to know I have personal support from someone of authority who understands how meaningful it is to listen to students directly and understand their concerns and needs.

It's true that a simple Internet search would yield an endless list of outstanding teaching awards and research publications that Dean Bottoms has earned, but those—while remarkable—are not the reason why Dean Bottoms inspires me. This is solely captured by the spirit I have seen from her leading by example. Although many deans are just a name to students, Dean Bottoms goes above and beyond what is expected to try to understand each student. I have always looked forward to receiving emails from Dean Bottoms encouraging all students to visit her in her open office hours, which was a time that Dean Bottoms had specifically organized to meet students and listen to them—their proud success, stressful ranting, or even class details. Some students are rightly apprehensive about speaking to a college dean, but the enthusiasm and warmth of Dean Bottoms easily makes her one of the most approachable faculty member at UIC. In her presence, students feel heard—we feel validated in our thoughts and worries as individuals trying to succeed, and this is something that is unfortunately rare and often lost in the vast college system.

Not only does Dean Bottoms listen to her students, but she also is unafraid of taking action when it is needed. What sets Dean Bottoms apart is her proactive belief in doing what is right despite any consequences. One example of this is when a student came to her with specific concerns regarding a professor and an exam. Upon hearing the conflict at hand, Dean Bottoms recognized an issue with the course that needed to be addressed, and knowing the weight of her word, she raised her voice about the student's concern to the next level of academic affairs.

This is only one of many testaments to the tireless dedication and heart that Dean Bottoms puts into her work with students. She has always rallied on our side, whether it's for academic fairness, greater financial aid amounts, or even student emergency funds. Her words that have always stayed



with me are “only the squeaking wheel get the grease—do not be cowed. You must raise your voice.”

I have incorporated this into my life very seriously by never keeping silent when I see injustice or unfairness at hand. Dean Bottoms has impacted my approach to problems because I am inspired by her fearlessness to act with integrity rather than conformity. Her commitment to the students and faculty of the University of Illinois at Chicago is unparalleled by any faculty that I have encountered in my college experience, and I am ever grateful for her leadership by example. I hope that Dean Bottoms may be recognized for her tireless efforts and continued guidance to those around her.