

The Associated Colleges of Illinois

A History 1963-1972

**Chapter Two: Increasing Support
for Private Education**



Increasing Support for Private Education

In the mid-1950s, after several years of building on its founding principles, the Associated Colleges of Illinois hired a new executive director, Albert N. Williams. Williams was an enthusiastic, energetic person with a clear vision for the organization's future. He would serve ACI for nearly seven years, during which time the organization would grow from a small start-up initiative to a fundraising organization widely recognized and supported throughout the state of Illinois.

By 1955, ACI was receiving nearly \$300,000 in annual contributions from a wide variety of corporate interests, including a historic \$150,000 grant from the Standard Oil Company (one of the original founders of the associated college movement) to independent colleges in fourteen states, including Illinois. The state association movement had taken hold, and corporate giving had shifted from small donations to individual schools to larger gifts to state funds such as ACI.

In his executive director's report at the 1955 annual meeting, Williams quoted from the *Bulletin of Educational Philosophy*: "The phenomenon of corporate gifts to groups of colleges instead of, or together with, gifts to single institutions, is one of the most significant developments in American higher education

since John Harvard gave the first individual gift that established the first such institution.”

Harold C. Coffman, still serving as ACI president, noted that corporations that contributed to state funds tended to give in larger amounts.

Williams noted in his 1956 report that “the arrival at this statistical point in our first three full fiscal years should mark the close of the experimental and developmental stage of [our organization]...the community now knows us; a substantial portion of the community supports us; the curiosity of seeing two college presidents pounding the pavement has worn off; and finally, the project is, for the first time, beginning to be worth the efforts [we] have put into it in terms of financial return.”

While ACI continued to solicit donations from corporations large and small by relying on cold-calling to introduce its program to executives, by 1956 this practice had begun to change. Williams called for ACI to reexamine its fundraising procedures and become more deliberate in its approach to soliciting donations—making fewer cold calls and setting more advance appointments with area business leaders.

Forging Closer Bonds with the Corporate Community

ACI also began to cultivate deeper, more permanent relationships with organizations such as the Illinois Manufacturers Association, the state Chamber of Commerce, the Illinois Bankers Association, and various labor unions, farm bureaus, PTAs, service groups, and other trade groups. Creating partnerships between ACI and influential members of industry was critical to the continued success of the associated colleges movement.

In 1958, several ideas were considered to help forge such ties. They included invitations to company executives to speak on college campuses or become faculty consultants, field trips by students to nearby plants and facilities, and solicitation of corporate support for student and faculty research.

Williams also believed that it had become increasingly important to put into place a more concrete form of donor recognition, and he encouraged each college president to acknowledge all corporate gifts promptly. Colleges were encouraged to mention corporate support in their correspondence with alumni, friends, parents, and students.

Also in this vein, executives from fifteen major corporate donor companies were invited to attend the 1958 ACI annual meeting, where they were given “distinguished corporate citizenship” awards. Corporations represented included Container Corporation, Hammond Organ Company, Inland Steel Company, and Jewel Tea Company. This was also the year the Independent College Funds of America or ICFA (now known as the Foundation for Independent Higher Education) was founded at the Union League Club in Chicago.

Taking ACI into the Sixties

In the early sixties, great societal discourse ensued about the future of higher education in America and about the merits of an educated society in general. In the anthology *Challenges and Change in American Education*, author James E. Allen, the commissioner of education for the State of New York, wrote, “I firmly believe that America’s greatest hope for meeting the challenges of education lies within the individual states.” He continued, “We must develop a new pattern of economic support for the educational system....”

It was against this backdrop that the Associated Colleges of Illinois looked ahead to the new decade. The organization was flourishing, and, in 1960, had reaped more than \$650,000 in donations for its member colleges. In 1961, ACI once again invited Dr. Frank Sparks, the former president of Wabash College in Indiana and founder of the Associated Colleges of Indiana, to speak at its annual meeting. Sparks, who had addressed ACI’s first official meeting, was now the president of the Council for Financial Aid to Education. In 1961, he reported on a decade of progress in the field of corporate support for education.

Sparks emphasized that state funds for independent colleges had come a long way in a short period of time. Ten years before, he said, corporations were giving practically nothing to support education. However, in 1960 they had given an estimated \$150 million. He articulated the three compelling reasons for a corporation to support education. First, a dollar given voluntarily to a private institution accomplishes more than a dollar given in extra taxes for support of a public university. Second, corporate gifts attract other contributions from alumni, foundations, and religious congregations. Third, he said, corporations—more than any other segment of society—have a stake in the preservation of free and independent higher education.

ACI Comes of Age

In 1961, another major shift occurred at the Associated Colleges of Illinois. The executive director's baton passed from Albert Williams, who had served faithfully for seven years, to John W. Huck, the man who would lead ACI for the next twenty years, helping it grow into a major fundraising force in Illinois. During this period, ACI was led by Chairman of the Board Robert P. Ludlum, president of Blackburn College, and President K. Richard Johnson, president of the National College of Education.

Huck was born and raised in Chicago and received his undergraduate degree from Dartmouth College. He received a master of arts degree from Columbia University and completed postgraduate work at the University of Chicago. He was awarded an honorary doctorate by Lincoln College in 1966.

Huck had a strong interest in community service and higher education, and through his leadership and direction the Associated Colleges of Illinois' capacity to support the cause of independently funded education grew significantly. By the time Huck stepped down in 1981, ACI had provided a total of more than \$21 million to its member colleges.

In his first address to the Board of Directors on May 10, 1961, Huck said, "It seems to me that the association has now come of age. Nine years ago, when a few of you sat down to plan this association, the whole subject of corporate support of higher education was in its infancy. Literally, tremendous strides have been made in the intervening years."

Huck went on to say that the initial fears some may have had about "corporate meddling" in academic affairs had not materialized. "I remember fifteen years ago when the subject of corporate support of education was first discussed," he said, "many of my colleagues looked upon it with misgiving, for they feared that the corporate piper might come to call the academic tune. I have seen little evidence of this."

***Creating opportunities
by building on strength.***

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