



Associated Colleges of Illinois

Illinois College and its president look to a future that inspires and empowers students



It's not unusual to see [Dr. Barbara A. Farley](#) helping new students move in to residence halls. Or, to see her at college athletic events. Or honoring students and their achievements. Or hosting guests at her campus home, Barnes House. Actively engaging students is part of the fabric of [Illinois College](#) in Jacksonville. While she participates, Farley often takes photographs and writes about these happenings in a variety of social media channels. She posts stories sent to her by other people, too. As president of Illinois College, Farley says storytelling is part of her leadership. Arguably the most prolific user of social media among presidents of ACI colleges and universities, Farley has been using social media since she began as president.

"I write all of this myself," she says. "I am telling the story of Illinois College every day, and the great people I get to meet. I've taken this as a challenge. It's a great way to expand the visibility of the institution."

Three 'guideposts' are Illinois College priorities

Using social media to expand the College's visibility is just one example of three "guideposts" on which Illinois College is focused. Besides greater visibility, Illinois College pays close attention to student success and building a sustainable foundation. "I think about those three priority areas as the centerpiece of all of the decisions we're going to make," Farley says. The College's three priorities are the result of nearly 18 months of campus-wide conversation and planning at Illinois College that took place after Farley became president in June 2013.

The first woman elected Illinois College president, Farley describes Illinois College as "an amazing institution" where it is "an honor" to serve. College trustees and the search committee prepared her well for her new assignment, Farley says. Her first six months in office were a whirlwind activity. She met individually with college trustees in



Illinois College President Barbara A. Farley

their home communities, did a 14-city presidential tour to meet alumni and other college partners, and helped plan her inauguration. She was literally living out of a suitcase. It wasn't until December 2013 that Farley was able to fully unpack at Barnes House.

The fact that Illinois College has a clear set of priorities is a reflection of the president herself. A native of South Bend, Indiana, Farley earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from the College of Saint Benedict, St. Joseph, Minnesota, and an M.B.A. and doctorate from the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota. Farley brought her formal education in organizational leadership, organizational behavior and strategic management to Illinois College, along with experience as a faculty member and academic dean. She previously held faculty appointments and academic department leadership roles at colleges and universities in Minnesota and Pennsylvania. Her most recent role before Illinois College was at Augsburg College, Minneapolis, where she was vice president of academic affairs and dean of the college. There, Farley says she learned what it might be like to be president of a liberal arts college.



Named for a former Illinois College president, Sturtevant Hall, built in 1857, is a campus landmark.

Illinois College's history spans 180 years. It was the first college in the state to grant a baccalaureate degree. Rooted in its original affiliations with two Protestant denominations, the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. and United Church of Christ, Illinois College values its social justice heritage. Jacksonville congregations of both denominations and the College work closely together on various initiatives. "We never lose sight that we are a church-affiliated institution,

and we're proud of the Presbyterian and UCC roots," Farley says. "These are roots that are real for us and present, and we're at a point of making them more visible to the campus community." For example, the campus community is actively engaged in interfaith conversations, and it has worked with the Interfaith Youth Core and its founder, Eboo Patel.

A bright future through expansion of programs and investing in students

Popular academic programs at Illinois College include biology, psychology, business and music, Farley says. The strength of these programs has led many students to attend graduate school or to career opportunities in these fields. The College has also established academic partnerships. In early 2016, Farley, faculty leaders and students traveled to Cuba to sign an agreement with the University of Pinar del Rio to conduct student exchange programs in biological and environmental research. "We were the first American higher education institution to sign an agreement with them," Farley says. Recently, the College also forged an agreement with Lincoln Land Community College, Springfield, Illinois, to enroll students in its elementary education curriculum.

Farley says she expects a great deal of the students who come to learn at Illinois College. For example, experiential learning is key at Illinois College through initiatives such as student-faculty research and global study. Many students go abroad to study in a variety of places. Among them, the College has specific learning and exchange opportunities in Japan through Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, and Kanazawa University, Ishikawa Prefecture.

"We are investing resources to expand opportunities for students to conduct research with faculty, study abroad, pursue internships and be involved in civic activities. This is a hallmark of



our institution. It's something that sets us apart, and this is an area that's going to continue to grow. We're committed to creating life-changing experiences for students," Farley says.

Like every college in the 21st century, Illinois College is trying new initiatives and programs to attract students to the institution. In 2016, the College reinstated its debate and forensics program, dormant for a decade. Led by Director Nick Scullo, the team earned the Garrison Newcomer Award, given annually by the Cross Examinational Debate Association to the top new program.

"Finish in Four," aims to maximize a student's investment in a college education while limiting tuition costs for families. The voluntary program was initiated this academic year. It guarantees that first-time, first-year

Much is expected of College students, Farley says.

Illinois College students will graduate in four years, or the College will pick up remaining costs for required courses. Finish in Four has produced an "overwhelming response," said Stephanie Chipman, vice president of enrollment management and college marketing. Another initiative is the college's book rental program. It ensures all students have their course materials on the first day of class by including book and materials costs in tuition. In particular, this student-success initiative aims to help students who may not be able to afford to buy books. Farley believes the program led to an increase in students who return after their first year in college.

These kinds of innovative programs led to a record 331 students in the college's incoming class this fall, up from 295 the previous year.

Relationships critical for student and institutional success

The relationship between Jacksonville and Illinois College is critical, Farley argues. In its earliest days, the town, situated between Springfield and St. Louis, sprang up around the newly founded college. Today, Illinois College is Jacksonville's second largest private employer. Leaders of the college and the city have worked together on economic development projects and partnerships. "I'd like to see more," Farley said.

In 2014, former President Jimmy Carter visited Illinois College, invited by Dr. Khalaf Ahmad Al Habtoor, chairman of the Al Habtoor Group, an international conglomerate based in the United Arab Emirates. Al Habtoor is a longtime friend of the College and recipient of an honorary doctorate. During that visit Al Habtoor launched "Pathways to Peace" at Illinois College, an initiative aimed at seeking solutions to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. That was "a hallmark day" for Illinois College, in which students and faculty engaged in thinking about Middle East peace, Chipman says. The College has continued its relationship with The Carter Center, based in Atlanta. On a regular basis, student groups visit The Carter Center.

Illinois College was a charter member when ACI was founded in 1952. Both organizations are "beautifully aligned," Farley says, pointing to the two organizations' emphasis on student success and positive outcomes in higher education. For this academic year, ACI has provided nearly \$18,000 in scholarship support to nine Illinois College students. Farley, who is president of the ACI Board of Trustees, also sees another significant role ACI plays in higher education. "It's important that ACI is able to raise the prominence, raise the visibility of private colleges and universities throughout the state of Illinois, to communities and to employers who rely on us to develop and prepare students who move into the workforce," Farley says.

She is also a strong advocate for private liberal arts colleges and their importance in higher education. "I really believe strongly that private liberal arts colleges have to do our work with high quality, with clarity about outcomes for students, and with a deep and enduring commitment to the long-term stewardship of the institution," Farley adds. In addition to her leadership with ACI, Farley serves on the executive committee for the Federation of Illinois

Colleges and Universities, and is a member of the Tax Policy Committee for the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.

As for the future, Farley's vision calls for Illinois College to build an international reputation for "inspiring achievement and empowering students to make a difference in the world."