



Associated Colleges of Illinois

A Liberal Arts Education Prepares Students Well, Benefits Society, Says College President

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Kurt Dykstra, president of Trinity Christian College, addresses financial advisors at ACI's Feb. 9 event.

A college education that emphasizes the liberal arts helps students prepare well for careers and to be prepared for unexpected things in life, said [Kurt D. Dykstra](#), president of [Trinity Christian College](#), Palos Heights, Illinois. In addition, research continues to show that an educated population is a benefit for society and the overall economy, he added.

Dykstra made the comments at a February 9 meeting of nearly 50 financial advisors and staff, sponsored by Associated Colleges of Illinois (ACI). ACI has [23 member colleges and universities](#) – all are small, independent, private institutions -- including Trinity Christian College. The organization raises funds to support first-generation, low-income and minority students through scholarships and provides programs to support students and staff at member institutions. Many students attending ACI institutions depend on some type of scholarship support.

"Our schools do a better job of educating first generation, low-income and minority students than our public counterparts," Dykstra told the advisors. "The persistence rates historically and every year indicate that students who go to schools like Trinity and the other 22 schools of ACI do better academically. They graduate, and they land better upon graduation. I think that's partially because of our size as schools, but I also it's partially because of the way we are trying to educate at the intersection of the liberal arts and professional preparation."

National research indicators show students who do best have high engagement while at school. Students who attend Trinity and other ACI colleges and universities engage in internships or practical field experience before graduation, Dykstra said. Also helpful are small classes and student-professor interactions, he said, all typical offerings at ACI-affiliated colleges and universities.

"The benefit of a college degree is at least as strong today as it's ever been," Dykstra said. Over a person's lifetime, net income is higher if the person has a college degree, with estimates ranging from \$300,000 to \$500,000 higher, he said.

Financial expert, author and financial commentator [Terry Savage](#) was also a guest speaker at the event. She said an ACI student scholarship – normally \$2,000 to \$3,000 – can make a significant difference. "That

\$2,000 or \$3,000 scholarship is not just the money that lets a student go to school now. It's the burden of the interest on that debt for 20 years or longer that keeps them from leading productive lives, from getting married, buying homes and thinking about having children. By giving a scholarship, you lift a good portion of that burden," she said.

The breakfast, designed to connect ACI's mission with the financial advisors, was funded by a Capacity-Building Grant from the [Council of Independent Colleges](#), Washington.