

The Associated Colleges of Illinois

A History 1993-2002

**Chapter Five: ACI Innovates
for the Future**



ACI Innovates for the Future

As the twenty-first century approached, the Associated Colleges of Illinois sought to demonstrate not only that its members clearly understood the compelling need to produce educated, technology-literate prospective employees, but also that the student-centered, values-based, community-minded education unique to private liberal arts institutions had become increasingly relevant to business and society. In 1991, after eight years of successful leadership at ACI, Carole Whitcomb departed to become president of the Foundation for Independent Higher Education. Her successor, David G. Utley, commented on the characteristics and benefits of independent liberal arts institutions in ACI's 1993 annual report:

The strengths of ACI institutions result less from what is taught than from how teaching is done, and by whom. The colleges' special value lies in the priority they give to excellence in teaching, their focus on the student, and their relatively small size.

By 1994, ACI colleges had produced more than 200,000 graduates prepared for successful careers and responsible citizenship. And that year, when the *Chicago Tribune* published a special report on excellence in undergraduate teaching, eleven of the seventeen profiles of outstanding Illinois professors featured faculty from ACI institutions.

Organizationally, the Associated Colleges of Illinois was flourishing as well, offering a multitude of scholarship and specialty programs designed to support nearly 40,000 students at twenty-five member colleges. ACI's *Scholarship Program*, including minority scholarships and "special purpose" scholarships, was assisting dozens of students each year. In addition, the *Nalco Science Equipment Grants* had disbursed nearly \$130,000 since its inception in 1989, and new programs were being created, including a workshop devoted entirely to international issues. These resources and accomplishments provided a strong foundation for the next phase of ACI's development.

"What is so compelling about ACI is its vision — its capacity to look beyond the old ways of doing things and become an active problem-solving consortium of like-minded institutions."

James R. Donnelley, partner, Stet & Query Ltd.

Invigorating ACI's Mission

In 1995, Jerry Fuller took over as executive director. His combination of experience as director of corporate relations at Northwestern University, together with a successful business career in financial services (at Duff & Phelps) and strategic planning, marketing, and finance (at American Hospital Supply Corporation), made him an ideal choice to lead ACI into the next century.

When Fuller took the helm, he identified three key challenges confronting the organization and its members: 1) As the number of minority, low-income, and first-generation college students began to grow rapidly, private liberal arts institutions were being challenged to innovate to meet the special needs of these populations; 2) The funding environment had begun to shift dramatically; and 3) The long-term positive benefits of private liberal arts education had not been articulated clearly to the public.

With the stock market soaring to unprecedented highs, corporations, foundations, and individuals could afford to be more generous than ever. But donors' expectations were changing: For many corporations, the line between philanthropy and marketing had begun to blur, and corporate donors had begun to favor giving opportunities that complemented their product lines and provided high visibility before prospective customers. Increasingly, foundations sought

to target their giving to solve specific societal problems, while individual donors became more participatory—seeking to have more control over how their dollars were spent and to secure greater accountability for results of philanthropy “investments.” Overall, donors seemed ever less inclined to make unrestricted gifts to higher education, preferring restricted gifts that produced tangible outcomes.

“Our ACI partnership began fifty years ago, when E. R. Moore, the grandson of our company’s founder, lent his support to a new association of private liberal arts colleges. Before he retired, Moore made sure that the company would maintain his commitment to liberal arts education. Our continuing support of ACI expresses our abiding belief that ACI member colleges and universities provide young people with the skills they need to excel in the professional world: self-discipline, the ability to meet deadlines, and excellent work habits.”

Karen Hartmann, president, E. R. Moore Company

Fuller led ACI through a productive strategic planning process, which helped focus the organization on how it could respond effectively to the challenges of this new funding environment, including identifying social and economic problems member colleges and universities could help solve. The original strategic planning process sparked discussion and development of a variety of targeted problem-solving programs. Ultimately, the ongoing planning process led to reformulation of the organization’s mission statement. The new mission reflected both the changing funding environment and society’s goals:

The Associated Colleges of Illinois is a group of independent liberal arts colleges and universities working with the private and public sectors to improve educational opportunities for first-generation, minority, and low-income students; to increase awareness of the value of a liberal arts education and its capacity to develop leaders for the twenty-first century; and to find creative solutions to some of society’s most pressing educational and social problems.

These critical steps cleared the way to a productive new era in ACI fundraising, program development, and marketing.

Problem-Solving Programs

Led by Minor Myers, jr., president of Illinois Wesleyan University and then president of ACI, the Associated Colleges of Illinois launched its first comprehensive program in 1996 to address a societal problem on which member colleges and universities could have a substantial impact. ACI's *College Readiness Program* began as a pilot program serving thirty high school students from inner-city Chicago and sought to improve high school graduation rates among low-income students and to increase the number of these students who continued with higher education.

College Readiness targeted students who showed potential for high school completion and college admission and who were motivated to participate actively in the program. Unlike similar programs available at the time (typically one-day or weekend sessions), ACI's *College Readiness Program* was designed as a four-year, year-round program, with students meeting one day each month on an ACI college campus, and a weeklong resident summer academy. By providing academic enrichment and real-life college campus experiences and by helping young people navigate college selection, admissions, and financial aid programs, *College Readiness* provided a road map to college and a gateway to mainstream society.

"ACI's *College Readiness Program* proves what many of us have always believed: If you give young people that chance, they can overcome disadvantages, finish high school, and do well in college."

Ernest A. Janus, partner, Janus Rappaport Assoc., Inc.

By 2002, ACI's *College Readiness Program* was serving more than 500 high school students in Chicago, East St. Louis, and central Illinois through partnerships among ACI member institutions, youth service organizations, and corporate and foundation donors. Results soared beyond even ACI's expectations: Of the seniors completing the *College Readiness Program*, ninety-nine percent graduated from high school and ninety-seven percent entered college.

The success of *College Readiness* helped foster development of other important initiatives, which were launched or in planning stages during the late 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century. The *SBC/Ameritech Faculty Development*

Technology Program, begun in 1997, had prepared more than 3,600 faculty on ACI campuses to integrate new technologies into classroom instruction by the end of the 2001–2002 academic year. ACI's *Technology Readiness Program*, in pilot testing in fall 2002, was designed to close the "digital divide" by providing ACI freshmen from disadvantaged backgrounds with the computer skills required for success at college.

"There are two things on everybody's mind: the cost of a college education and the need to get more low-income students into higher education. ACI has been really effective in convincing people to invest in scholarships that make college more affordable for everyone."

Toni S. Smith, Spencer Stuart (retired)

At this writing, ACI had just received a \$2.2 million U.S. Department of Education Transition to Teaching grant in support of *Teachers Lead, Leaders Teach*, ACI's teacher education initiative, an effort to relieve the growing shortage of classroom teachers through alternative teacher certification programs and other special initiatives. ACI identified the teacher shortage as a critical issue in 1999, when it established its *Teacher Education Task Force* to study the problem. The first *Teachers Lead, Leaders Teach* activity, an induction program for ACI teacher education graduates starting careers in the Chicago Public Schools, was conducted in October 2002, with funding from the John C. Griswold Foundation and the Foundation for Independent Higher Education/UPS Venture Fund.

Visibility for Liberal Arts Education

Enhanced communication was the watchword for ACI as it entered the twenty-first century. In fall 1999, ACI launched its first regular newsletter. Published in fall, winter, and spring each year, *ACI Reporter* delivers critical messages to key target audiences, including corporate donors, foundation funders, program partners, policy-makers, and other friends of ACI. By spring 2000, ACI had launched *ACI Online* (www.acifund.org), a comprehensive Web site that includes both information about ACI and its programs and links to ACI member colleges and universities. In 2001, ACI kicked off an ongoing media relations program, designed to raise the visibility of private higher education in Illinois, in the context of articles and reports about ACI programs and events and current issues in higher education.

In mid-2000, the Associated Colleges of Illinois began planning for the organization's fiftieth anniversary in 2002, which was described by Minor Myers, jr. as "a once-in-a-century opportunity for the Associated Colleges of Illinois to capture the general public's attention and to raise the visibility of our member colleges and universities; of the distinctive education we offer; and of our capacity to develop leaders for the twenty-first century."

"The Associated Colleges of Illinois has been a valuable resource for Lake Forest College over the years—not only in securing gifts from funding sources that might not otherwise support the college, but also by sharing with others the immediate and long-term value of a liberal arts education. We are grateful for ACI's many services and programs that have benefited low-income and minority students as well as its member colleges and universities, and we look forward to continuing our association with ACI in the years ahead."

Stephen D. Schutt, president, Lake Forest College

Led by Myers, Chairman Peter S. Willmott, and Executive Director Jerry Fuller, ACI developed a comprehensive plan to mark this important event. The plan sought to develop new resources for ACI and its member institutions and to create an environment more favorable to future funding. Organized on the theme *Liberal Arts for Leadership*, the plan called for raising the visibility of Illinois' network of private liberal arts colleges and universities and for demonstrating the ability of these institutions to develop leadership qualities in young men and women, instilling in them the desire to serve business, family, and society throughout their lives.

The fiftieth anniversary celebration began with ACI's forty-ninth annual meeting on March 21, 2001. In his opening statement, Myers identified *Liberal Arts for Leadership* as the unique mission of ACI's member institutions and explained that ACI's first-ever public annual meeting was designed to "explore both the nature of liberal arts education and the meaning of leadership, and how these two concepts come together on the campuses of the member institutions of the Associated Colleges of Illinois."

Peter A. Fellowes, an ACI business trustee and a former faculty member of North Park University, defined liberal arts education in a brief essay, stating: "A liberal

arts education makes only a border crossing into the realms of history, science and the humanities, the arts, and the social sciences. But in doing so, it can teach inquisitive minds to respond in modes of thought, feeling, and expression that are distinctive to these disciplines....It is the intellectual prerequisite to a critical perspective on the present."

The contribution of liberal arts institutions to society was validated by guest speakers William E. Hamm, president of the Foundation for Independent Higher Education, the nationwide network of state associations to which ACI belongs, and Hazel F. Loucks, Illinois' deputy governor for education and workforce. Loucks presented ACI with a gubernatorial proclamation, declaring the week of March 19–23, 2001, to be "*Liberal Arts for Leadership Week*." The week "celebrate[s] the value and values of liberal arts education, as represented by the member colleges and universities of the Associated Colleges of Illinois—and honor[s] ACI as it approaches fifty years of ensuring that these values inure to the benefit of the people of the State of Illinois, according to the proclamation."

The proclamation noted that ACI member colleges and universities "respond to Illinois' growing demand for a well-educated and technology-literate workforce, sending more than 8,500 graduates into the workplace each year and...stimulate the economic, intellectual, and cultural life in the Illinois communities in which they reside."

"Dominican University and ACI share a similar vision—to raise awareness of the importance of the liberal arts and sciences in today's changing world and to encourage students, especially those from underrepresented populations, to enroll in liberal arts institutions. ACI has proven itself to be an innovative partner for the small liberal arts university."

Donna M. Carroll, president, Dominican University

In *Liberal Arts for Leadership*, the term "leadership" was defined for ACI in large part by the introduction of the first class of *Shining Examples of Liberal Arts for Leadership*, a group of four young alumni of ACI institutions who most clearly reflected the meaning of the fiftieth anniversary celebration's theme.

ACI's forty-ninth annual meeting kicked off a series of communications activities built around the *Liberal Arts for Leadership* theme, including the summer

2001 publication of the organization's first image brochure for cultivation of donors and decision-makers. Late that summer, ACI launched the *Liberal Arts for Leadership Essay Contest*, which challenged graduating (2002) seniors at ACI member institutions to explore the value of liberal arts education and how it developed their leadership skills. The five winning essayists were awarded \$4,500 scholarships. Their essays, which make a compelling case for Illinois' small private liberal arts institutions as the proving ground for future leaders, were published in full in a commemorative program distributed at the 2002 annual meeting and mailed to hundreds of Illinois decision-makers and prospective funders in the months thereafter.

ACI's forty-ninth annual meeting also marked the installation of James M. Dennis, president of McKendree College since 1994, as ACI's new president. Formerly the vice president for student affairs at the University of Southern California, Dennis brought long-standing experience in supporting the needs and aspirations of disadvantaged youth (he was a founder of the NCAA's National Youth Program) that made him an especially good fit for ACI and its twenty-first-century mission.

"ACI is a great voice for private liberal arts colleges in Illinois—helping to make our case to corporations and foundations, serving as a value-added problem solver, and building relationships with funders that we might not engage as individual institutions."

Harold R. Wilde, president, North Central College

ACI continued its *Liberal Arts for Leadership*/fiftieth anniversary celebration at its fiftieth annual meeting on March 20, 2002, which, commented Chairman Peter S. Willmott, "paid tribute to a special group of students whose untapped potential is the fuel that will energize America's future: *First Generation Graduates, Next Generation Leaders*." The meeting featured two guest speakers: Adrian King, manager of educational programs for the Coca-Cola Foundation, which sponsors a scholarship program for first-generation college students, and Donald M. Stewart, president of the Chicago Community Trust and a first-generation college graduate. In introducing King, ACI President James M. Dennis commented:

The underlying philosophy of the Associated Colleges of Illinois is that partnerships between business and higher education can solve problems that neither the corporate world nor academia could solve alone. Meeting the needs of first-generation college students is clearly a challenge that demands effective partnership. ACI member colleges and universities are fully prepared to provide all the necessary educational and social supports, but first-generation students need to know that the financial supports are there, as well—and that corporate America is ready to welcome them in the boardrooms and the executive suites.

"For five decades the Associated Colleges of Illinois has been the preeminent voice of liberal arts colleges in Illinois. ACI initially established its reputation by raising funds to support student scholarships and operating budgets of member colleges. Today ACI also promotes and funds joint programs among member institutions, facilitates cost-saving measures, stimulates technological innovation, and encourages meaningful collaboration between presidents of member institutions and executives in the business community."

Richard A. Yanikoski, president, Saint Xavier University

Documenting Outcomes

To address the critical need to document the long-term outcomes of liberal arts education, in 2001 ACI completed *Learning to Lead: The Impact of Private Liberal Arts Education*, ACI's fiftieth anniversary alumni research project. *Learning to Lead*, funded by the James S. Kemper Foundation and the FIHE/UPS Venture Fund, consisted of more than 300 telephone interviews among a random sample of ACI member college alumni who graduated between 1958 and 1995. Their responses were compared with those of graduates from other private colleges and public universities. Private liberal arts education measured up admirably. From problem solving to communicating across racial, ethnic, and gender divides, ACI alumni felt better prepared than did alumni from other institutions. Data from the study validated the key messages around which ACI had long built its communications strategy: that independent liberal arts institutions impart the values, knowledge, and skills essential to a lifetime of effective service to business, society, and community and that ACI member colleges and universities are developing leadership for the twenty-first century.

Strategic Partnerships

Given the changing funding environment in the late 1990s and early 2000s, ACI's resource development program sought to promote "the power of partnership"—opportunities for funders to partner with ACI and its member colleges and universities to achieve specific business and societal objectives. This approach opened the door to productive *Strategic Sourcing Initiatives* with fourteen major vendors, including Banc One Capital Markets, which helped ACI develop pooled bond funds totaling \$70 million to finance capital projects at ACI colleges, saving participating institutions \$500,000 in transaction costs; and Microsoft Corporation's Select Program, which offered ACI colleges state-of-the-art software at prices below the standard educational discount, saving member colleges nearly \$50,000 on 2,000 software licenses during the program's first year.

Other partnerships addressed specific needs expressed by funders. For example, Motorola Corporation's desire to build a pool of qualified minority job applicants led to the establishment of a Motorola-funded competitive scholarship program for minority students.

"Knox College is honored to share the commitment of ACI and its member institutions to higher education. ACI demonstrates its commitment to the liberal arts every day through programs that support educational opportunities for all students, regardless of their financial means. ACI is truly helping grow the leaders of tomorrow."

Roger Taylor '63, president, Knox College

To encourage other funders to follow Motorola's example—targeting their philanthropy to specific corporate interests and student needs—ACI created a wide variety of directed scholarships. By the conclusion of the 2001–2002 academic year, ACI's *Scholarship Program* had provided more than 1,000 students with nearly \$2.8 million in tuition assistance.

ACI's *College Readiness Program* and other special initiatives also attracted substantial funding from sources that had never previously supported the Associated Colleges of Illinois. *College Readiness* attracted nearly \$2 million in new support between 1996 and 2002. Between 1999 and 2002, ACI was

awarded five grants from the FIHE/UPS Venture Fund's competitive grants program (more than any other state association), which funded projects ranging from the *Liberal Arts for Leadership Essay Contest* to the *Technology Readiness Program*. *Teachers Lead, Leaders Teach*, still under development at this writing, already had attracted key grants from the Chicago Community Trust and the Griswold Foundation, as well as \$2.2 million in U.S. Department of Education funding.

"By listening carefully and acting collectively, ACI identified the teacher shortage as a critical issue two years before it emerged on the national agenda. *Teachers Lead, Teachers Teach* gives member colleges a leadership role in helping to solve this problem by leveraging our natural strengths."

James M. Dennis, president, McKendree College

That "the power of partnership" has proven an effective resource development strategy is inarguable. At the close of its fiftieth anniversary year, ACI had raised a total of more than \$51 million in its history to support private higher education.

Looking to the Future

When this history was written, the Associated Colleges of Illinois was concluding its fiftieth anniversary celebration. Despite economic and political uncertainties, the organization was better positioned than ever before to support the tradition of private liberal arts education, while meeting the needs of the students, the state, and the nation. In the words of ACI Chairman Peter S. Willmott:

Liberal Arts for Leadership is more than a convenient slogan. It lies at the heart of what the Associated Colleges of Illinois is all about: providing young people with the knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to emerge from ACI member campuses as leaders for the twenty-first century.

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

1952-2012



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Established 1952

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