



# ACI Reporter

Spring 2015

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## From the Executive Director



***Associated Colleges of Illinois is building an exciting future.***

Welcome to the new *ACI Reporter*, a quarterly newsletter designed to engage and inform ACI family, friends, and supporters as we guide Associated Colleges of Illinois into the future. Please take a few moments to read about ACI programs; meet our members and the students they serve, our donors, and our *Business Partners*; and learn about the distinctive brand of higher education delivered by Illinois' smaller, private, liberal arts colleges and universities.

**In the whirlwind four months since I took the reins at ACI, I've been doing just that: learning about ACI through a statewide listening tour.** Over the past six weeks, I met with 21 of our 23 ACI Presidents, getting to know their campuses and their key concerns. It's been enjoyable and enlightening, and I'm grateful for the insights and the hospitality these ACI Presidents extended. Our discussions helped shape the agenda for the coming months:

***Executive Director Mick Weltman***

1. **ACI Donors – We're excited to meet all our new longstanding donors to learn about their funding and program priorities,** to share our plans for the future, and to find new ways ACI can partner with them. If you are a

funder (or prospective funder!) and would like to meet us sooner rather than later, please feel free to call ACI Director of Development Katrina Wyss,  [\(312\) 263-2391, ext. 538](tel:(312)263-2391) or [kwyss@acifund.org](mailto:kwyss@acifund.org), and she'll get you on our calendar right away.

**2. Scholarship Funding – Growing ACI's *Scholarship and Emergency Financial Aid Program* is taking center stage at ACI.** As our member colleges and universities increase the proportion of low-income students on campus, demand for financial aid is increasing exponentially. To ensure that deserving students – now and in the future -- can enjoy the benefits of the efficient and personalized education at Illinois' smaller, private, liberal arts colleges and universities, ACI will broaden and deepen scholarship support, with a special emphasis on both named and endowed scholarships. If you would like to help us develop these critical funds, contact ACI Director of Development Katrina Wyss,  [\(312\) 263-2391, ext. 538](tel:(312)263-2391) or [kwyss@acifund.org](mailto:kwyss@acifund.org).

**3. Peer Mentoring: A Signature Program – ACI's *Peer Mentoring Program* is changing lives and improving retention rates for low-income, minority, and first generation students at ACI campuses.** You can learn about this important program and meet some of its beneficiaries in this newsletter. There's no question that *Peer Mentoring* can be a critical ingredient in closing Illinois' educational attainment gap and developing the college-educated workforce we need to prosper in the future. Going forward, we expect ACI's *Peer Mentoring Program* to emerge as our signature initiative, and we're making plans to grow this program so that it serves more students on more ACI campuses.

**4. Professional Development Conferences – Meeting our members' needs for professional development is emerging as a core ACI initiative;** As the cost of attending regional and national conferences rises, ACI members look for opportunities to address the unique concerns of smaller, private colleges and universities. In 2015, ACI is offering spring (*see article below*) and fall conferences for Development Officers and Finance Officers, and these special interest groups also will benefit from a summer webinar. Plans are underway for additional conferences to serve other administrative and faculty disciplines in the months to come. For additional information, contact ACI's Director, Conferences & Scholarships Tina Redmond at  [\(312\) 263-2391, ext. 526](tel:(312)263-2391) or at [aredmond@acifund.org](mailto:redmond@acifund.org).

**As we begin the countdown to our 65<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2017, ACI is far from retiring.** Our organization stands on the cusp on what could be its most exciting and productive period, with a mission that is increasingly relevant and with an increasingly vital base of leaders and funders. Whether you are an ACI President, Business Trustee, donor, sponsor, or friend – thank you for your support. I am proud to serve you, and I look forward to hearing your comments (and thoughtful criticisms!) as I collaborate with you to set the course for the future. Please don't hesitate to pick up the phone and contact me at  [\(312\) 263-2391, ext. 523](tel:(312)263-2391) or [mweltman@acifund.org](mailto:mweltman@acifund.org).

## Upcoming Events

***ACI Professional Development Conferences serve Financial Officers and Advancement Professionals this spring.***

**Spring 2015 Financial Officers Conference – Thursday, April 23, 2015 (noon) through lunch on Friday, April 24, 2015, at Quincy University, Quincy, Illinois.** Conference topics will include: FASB Financial Statements for Not-for-Profit Entities, Trends in Higher Education Benefits & New 2015 ACA IRS Reporting Requirements, Cyber Security, and Strategies and Trends in the Higher Education Industry. For conference details and to register, [click here](#).

**Spring 2015 Advancement Professionals Conference – Monday, April 13, 2015 (lunch) through noon on Tuesday, April 14, 2015, at University of St. Francis, Joliet, Illinois.** Luncheon keynote on Monday by Michael LaRocco, PhD, former Dean of the College of Business & Health Administration, University of St. Francis. Conference topics will include: Building an Alumni Volunteer Program, Creating Larger Reunion Gifts, Trends in Advancement Metrics, Telling Your Story with Pictures, Alumni Board Strategies, Collaborative Fundraising with Athletics, Young Alumni Engagement, Creating a Successful Student Alumni Mentoring Program, Who Said that Special Events Can't Work?, Data Analytics, and Establishing Affinity Groups. For conference details and to register, [click here](#).

**Please Note:** ACI Professional Development Conferences are not open to the public. Only administrators and faculty at ACI member institutions may register. If you are a business that would like to sponsor one of these conferences, please contact ACI's Director of Business Partnerships, Jackie Meyers-Thompson ([773\) 293-7166](tel:773-293-7166), [jthompson@acifund.org](mailto:jthompson@acifund.org)

## From the Chairman



Board Chairman, Al Cave

**Private higher education is one of America's great values.**

"Depending on the source of information," writes S. Georgia Nugent, "...today's students are told college is the best investment they can make – or that it's a waste of time." More than ever before, she declares, high school students (and their parents) need guidance to navigate "through the sea of propaganda and mis- or disinformation that swirls about them in our digital world." Nugent, President Emeritus of Kenyon College (Gambier, Ohio) and leader of the Council of Independent Colleges' (CIC) national "Power of Liberal Arts" public information campaign, reminds us that ACI has an important role to play in making the case for private higher education. All of us – ACI's member institution Presidents, Business Trustees and Business Partners, donors and friends – can help spread the word: Illinois' smaller, private colleges and universities deliver outstanding value to today's students, and they are accessible to every Illinois family, regardless of income.

Nugent's recent article in *The Journal of College Admission* (see attached) provides all the ammunition we need to explode the many myths promulgated by media and even by some policy-makers about private higher education. Here are some of the key facts that bring private higher education into clear focus for students and parents:

- **Private higher education is for everyone, regardless of race or socioeconomic status.** Private liberal arts colleges enroll about the same percentage of low-income and minority students as public universities, and almost one-third of private college students hail from low-income families.
- **All students, from all backgrounds, graduate at higher rates in shorter time periods from the nation's private colleges than from public universities.**
- **Private higher education is affordable – sometimes more so than public institutions.** Students at independent colleges and universities are twice as likely to receive aid from their college as are their peers at publics, and the size of grants at private colleges (averaging \$15,000) is likely to be three times larger than at publics (averaging \$5,000).
- **Private college students generally graduate with far less debt than media stories suggest.** More than one-third of private college graduates have no debt or less than \$10,000 debt. The average debt for graduates of four-year private institutions is \$19,500, about the price of a Ford Focus. Yet we've heard no outcry about the "staggering debt" incurred to purchase this modest automobile.
- **Liberal arts graduates are highly employable, and their investment in college delivers dramatic returns.** Research shows that 85-95% of alumni of many liberal arts institutions are either fully employed or in graduate school within six months of graduation. Even in the depths of the Great Recession, the unemployment rate for college graduates was about half that of non-college graduates. A new study shows that workers who majored in the liberal arts earn more in annual salary during peak earning years than those who majored in professional or pre-professional fields, and the US Census Bureau confirms that lifetime earnings for college graduates are about \$1 million more than earnings of non-graduates.

As Chairman of Associated Colleges of Illinois, I'm proud to be part of one of Illinois' most positive stories – the story of our critical network of private colleges and universities. By helping us tell this story throughout our communities, you can generate greater support for our member institutions and the students they serve and, as Georgia

Nugent suggests, help students and parents, your family, friends, and neighbors, navigate through the misinformation to choose a college the best meets their needs. **If you have questions about making the case for private higher education, please call ACI Executive Director Mick Weltman at  [\(312\) 263-2391, ext. 523](tel:(312)263-2391) or email [mweltman@acifund.org](mailto:mweltman@acifund.org).**

## Featured ACI Program

***ACI's College Readiness & Completion Initiative addresses national priorities  
—  
creating opportunities for individuals and building our nation's future.***

The United States could face a serious supply vs. demand gap in our labor force. By 2025, two-thirds of available American jobs will require postsecondary education however, at the rate Americans now earn college degrees, we will have five million fewer qualified workers than we need to fill those jobs as early as 2020. To help close that gap, a national movement has coalesced around re-establishing the United States as a leader in granting college degrees and ensuring that, by 2025, 60% of Americans attain a higher education degree or certificate.

**Associated Colleges of Illinois is part of that movement. In fact, ACI actually pioneered Illinois' efforts to improve college access and completion rates nearly two decades ago.** Since 1996, ACI has successfully prepared more than 2,000 low-income and minority high school students to identify, qualify for, apply to, enroll in, ultimately, succeed at colleges well matched to their personal and academic profiles. Today, ACI's ***College Readiness and Retention Initiative*** addresses two goals critical to building the college-educated workforce the United States needs to prosper in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: ACI's ***Summer Academy*** helps low-income and minority high school students develop the knowledge and confidence to apply to and enroll at more selective residential colleges, and ACI's ***Peer Mentoring Program*** promotes college success among at-risk college freshmen enrolled at ACI member institutions.

**ACI's *Summer Academy*, a free, five-day program at Trinity Christian College, provides rising high school juniors with real-world exposure to college-level academics and residential life, one-on-one college coaching, and career development activities.** *Summer Academy* aims to improve the chances that participants will select, apply to, and enroll in colleges well-matched to their personal and academic profiles. Participants are low-income, minority, and first-generation high school students selected by our partners at Chicago's **Noble Network of Charter Schools**, which provides college preparatory curricula and college readiness activities throughout the academic year.



***ACI Buisness Partners and students from Noble Network high schools discuss college at Summer Academy's ---- Roundtable***

**ACI's Peer Mentoring Program matches minority, low-income, and first-generation freshmen enrolled at ACI member institutions with trained and supervised Peer Mentors who help these at-risk students navigate the critical first year of college.** Now serving more than 100 students at **Dominican University, North Park University, and Augustana College**, ACI's *Peer Mentoring Program* builds a "relationship bridge" between at-risk students, the campus community, and the college's social, academic, financial, and multicultural support services. The intentional mentor-mentee relationships cultivated by ACI's *Peer Mentoring Program* constitute an "early warning system" that anticipates the challenges these students face and enables colleges to intervene, early and often, with personalized supports that promote college persistence. Mentors are chosen on the basis of their academic success, campus connections, and interpersonal qualities that model critical elements of student success. They receive \$2,500 scholarships in exchange for mentoring a cohort of five freshman cohort throughout the year.

**ACI's 2013-14 Peer Mentoring Program has produced extremely positive results.** Of the 73 freshmen who participated, 93% successfully transitioned from the fall to the spring semester and registered to return as sophomores in fall 2014.

**ACI plans to grow the Peer Mentoring Program to serve more students on more ACI campuses.** Donors can sponsor a *Peer Mentor* with a named scholarship of \$2,500 each or support a freshman mentee for \$500. Other opportunities to participate include growing ACI's *Special Incentives Fund*, an emergency fund that helps at-risk students stay in school by meeting emergency needs for books, transportation, special programs, and other unanticipated expenses. **To learn more about supporting ACI's College Readiness & Completion Initiative, call ACI Director of Development Katrina Wyss at [312\) 263-2391, ext. 538](tel:3122632391) or email her at [kwyss@acifund.org](mailto:kwyss@acifund.org).**

## Student Voices

***ACI Peer Mentors and Mentees talk about lives and futures transformed.***

**Andrea Hinojosa is an ACI Peer Mentor who knows where she's headed, thanks to the ACI Peer Mentor who helped her navigate her critical freshman year.** Now a junior at **Dominican University** (River Forest, Illinois), Hinojosa hopes her major in nutrition and minor in social justice and civic engagement will lead her to a career in an international organization addressing hunger and nutrition. She has been interested in these fields since her father nearly died of a food-borne illness contracted in the family's native Bolivia.

"When I came to Dominican as a freshman, I knew I wanted to study something science related," explains Hinojosa. "But I was also interested in social work, and I knew it wasn't manageable to do both. My *Peer Mentor* helped me narrow things down and choose courses that would accomplish my goals."

**As a first-generation college student from an immigrant family, Hinojosa found mentoring invaluable.** "Ever since I was little, I had to do things on my own," she says. "If the school sent home a letter to my parents, I had to open it and take care of whatever needed to be done. I had to learn how to do all the grown-up stuff – fill out the FAFSA (federal financial aid) forms, apply for college, everything." At Dominican, Hinojosa met many other students in the same boat. "That's how I learned to be an effective mentor," she says. "I know where the hidden problems are, so I can help my mentees avoid the same mistakes I made. I try to anticipate all the little things that could go wrong for them and help them solve them before they become big problems – so their stress levels drop. I feel so happy when I see my mentees really get it."

**"Peer Mentoring was life-changing for me," concludes Hinojosa, "and I'm proud to help make it life-changing for the students in my cohort."**

**For Devin Childress, a freshman Mentee at North Park University (Chicago, Illinois), ACI's Peer Mentoring Program has been transformative – changing both how he sees himself and how he performs academically.** "To be honest, I wasn't the greatest student in high school," admits Childress, who was a football star at Willowbrook High School in Villa Park, Illinois. "I was focused on being a great athlete, and it wasn't until my junior year that I realized I

needed to take academics more seriously and become a great *student-athlete*." At North Park University, Childress feels obligated to do better, "but without ACI's *Peer Mentoring Program*," he says, "I would feel like I had to do better all by myself. The program gives me a sense that there are people looking over my shoulder with the same plan in mind, who want to help me succeed, who believe in me and will push me to do better."

**As Childress learns to do better academically, ACI's *Peer Mentoring* is also teaching him what it takes to be a role model.** "I see how our mentors act around me and how they act when they don't know I am watching, and they are always the same," Childress observes. "They realize that they need to set good examples and that their younger peers are looking up to them. That teaches me that I, too, can be a good example for someone else. I'm learning that doing what is right, what needs to be done, is not just about looking good to the authority figures watching me -- but it's good for me. It promotes my own success."

**Childress believes other students in the program are experiencing similar transformations.** "There is not one student in our program who is the same as they were in high school," Childress asserts. "*Peer Mentoring* ensures that we get off on the right foot our freshman year, academically and socially. We build relationships that will last forever -- with students and professors and all kinds of people -- and that just leads to a smoother college experience."

**The impact of ACI's *Peer Mentoring Program* extends beyond the college campus, beyond graduation.** "Looking at the bigger picture, *Peer Mentoring* surrounds us with an atmosphere that protects students from negative thoughts of dropping out of college, and that's important because our communities need more educated people," Childress says. "**ACI's *Peer Mentoring Program* has given me the confidence to believe I can succeed as one of those educated people who can build my community.**"

## ACI Scholars

**ACI's Scholarship Program means students can go the distance and earn their degrees on time.**

**ACI's Scholarship & Emergency Financial Aid Program helps more undergraduates, especially those from low-to-moderate income families, benefit from the distinct advantages of private higher education -- even if they suffer reversals of fortune once enrolled at an ACI college or university.** Since 1990, ACI's *Scholarship Program* has distributed more than \$7 million in financial support to more than 3,000 undergraduate students at ACI institutions throughout Illinois. Today, ACI's *Scholarship Program* is more important than ever -- because growth in our nation's college-age population is occurring primarily among families least able to afford higher education. In fact, since 2000, ACI's private, mission-driven institutions have collectively increased by 32% enrollment of low-income students who qualify for federal financial assistance (known as "Pell Grant-eligible students").

**How ACI's Scholarship & Emergency Financial Aid Program works.** Thanks to our generous donors, each spring, ACI offers a pool of scholarships for the upcoming fall term. The pool is allocated among ACI member colleges and universities, where financial aid officers administer the application and awards process. Similarly, all member institutions receive a share of ACI's *Emergency Financial Aid*, a pool of funds provided by the McGraw Foundation and Fifth Third Bank. *Emergency Financial Aid* is awarded throughout the year, whenever students present compelling needs for help with tuition and other education expenses.

**Meet some of our most recent ACI Scholarship Program beneficiaries:**

**Katrina (Elmhurst College '15)** took on full responsibility for paying her college tuition when her parents began experiencing financial problems. She holds down two part-time jobs, but she began to fall behind on her tuition payments last fall. "I understand that I have responsibilities to pay for my tuition, but there is a limit to how many hours I can work in order to stay on track with my academic studies." An ACI *Scholarship* helped Katrina keep her head above water and stay in school to finish her degree in biology.

**Cameron (Quincy University '16)** welcomed his ACI *Scholarship* explaining: "Since I was raised by a single mother, paying for my education was always a huge worry of hers. With this scholarship, some the worries of my mother and I have been alleviated. Also, as an African-American, I am well aware that there are several stereotypes and prejudices that believe, and sometimes even hope, that I will not be successful in college. When I receive scholarships...not only does it fuel my dream to be a successful college-educated man, also it gives me hope that people besides my family and I believe in me. I promise that the money you donated will not go to waste."

**Megan (Eureka College '15)** relied on her ACI *Scholarship* to help her regain financial stability and stay in school after a natural disaster: "Back in November, I was devastated by the Washington, Illinois tornado. I lived in the Georgetown Common Apartment buildings located in Washington at the time. Fortunately, I walked away without any physical injuries and was later able to retrieve a portion of my things. Since November, I have been back to Washington to help with the recovery and clean-up efforts two or three times because I understand what challenges others are facing, and there is still a great need for help. It was quite an experience, and I have certainly learned a lot from the event."

**You can be part of ACI's *Scholarship & Emergency Financial Aid Program*.** ACI's *Scholarship Program* is donor-driven, which means funders may target support to students who meet specific criteria or who are pursuing specific career paths. Donors also may create named scholarships in honor or in memory of a loved one or colleague. Scholarships may be given annually or endowed in perpetuity, and they may be designated as one-year or multi-year awards.

To arrange for a named scholarship or to build ACI's pool of *Emergency Financial Aid* funds, contact ACI Executive Director Mick Weltman at [mweltman@acifund.org](mailto:mweltman@acifund.org), or call [312\) 263-2391, ext. 523](tel:3122632391).

## Meet ACI Members



*Dominican President Donna M. Carroll*

### ***Dominican University (River Forest, Illinois): Transformative education for a new generation***

"Dominican University is an intentionally small, Catholic institution, with heartfelt empathy for immigrants, a deep commitment to social justice, and an enduring tradition of advocacy for the underserved," says Donna M. Carroll, president. "We describe ourselves as a distinctively relationship-centered community that believes in transformational education that we hope inspires our undergraduates to consider how they, in turn, can transform their own communities."

***U.S. News & World Report* ranks Dominican University among the top 20 Midwest regional universities** and cites it as one of three Illinois colleges that offer a "best value" in higher education. With just under 3,800 students, Dominican's average class size is only 17; the student-faculty ratio is 11:1, and all classes are taught by professors, not teaching assistants.

The university offers more than 50 academic majors, including several pre-professional programs, as well as graduate degrees in library and information science, business, education, and social work. All Dominican University programs, says Carroll, "are characterized by a values-centered approach that embraces the whole person and cultivates independent thought and respect for divergent opinions."

**Dominican University's 2014-15 freshman class is 60% first generation and 58% Latino, which, Carroll observes, reflects the shifting demographics of the nation's college-age population.** "These students arrive," she says, "without any sense of entitlement -- but rather, with a sense of obligation, a sense that, upon graduation, their accomplishment is not solely their own, but also the accomplishments of and for their family and their community." As a

result, Dominican University is conscious of a special responsibility to this population: "We know we have an obligation to build leadership capacity in this new generation -- and to give them the skills they need to effect positive change in their community."

**This sense of obligation to the next generation drives Dominican University's participation in ACI's Peer Mentoring Program.** Dominican now supports a cohort of 44 freshmen through the efforts of nine *Peer Mentors*, as well as the continuing participation and enthusiasm of 17 sophomores who benefited from *Peer Mentoring* in 2013-14. President Carroll concludes: "We believe that by going the extra mile for at-risk students, we can help raise up a generation of productive young adults equipped to make a difference in the world."

## Building ACI Business Partnerships

***How do ACI colleges and universities provide satisfying, cost-effective campus dining experiences to their students?***

***Five ACI members have built a strategic partnership with Aramark.***

**With more than 270,000 employees in 22 countries, Aramark enriches the lives of millions of people daily.** In North America, Aramark partners with more than 600 colleges and universities, delivering customized solutions to each client, including ACI members Lake Forest College, Millikin University, Monmouth College, North Park University, and Rockford University. "We're committed to understanding the unique needs of each campus and its students, employees, and local communities," explains Jeff Bohn, Aramark's Director of Business Development. "We draw on that understanding to customize hospitality programs that increase student satisfaction. When colleges work with Aramark," observes Bohn, "they can be confident that they are collaborating with the right people with the right skills, the right attitude, and a deep understanding of students' wants and needs. That's true whether we're called in to provide strategic counsel or just late-night pizza."

**Associated Colleges of Illinois proudly welcomed Aramark as an ACI Business Partner in 2012.** Aramark is recognized among the Most Admired Companies by Fortune and ranked among the World's Most Ethical Companies by the Ethisphere Institute. And for 2015, Aramark earned a perfect score on the Human Rights Campaign Foundation's Corporate Equality Index.

**Bohn says supporting ACI's vision and mission through Business Partnership is a natural for Aramark.** "ACI's *College to Careers Initiative* really complements our work at Aramark," he explains. "We hire 1000+ interns and college graduates each year -- predominantly from client universities -- for two corporate leadership programs, one to provide management training for new college hires and a second that provides paid internships that give students meaningful, hands-on work experience." This commitment to leadership development characterizes Aramark's strategic partnerships with ACI members, says Bohn. "We currently employ more than 150 student workers," he reports, "including 10 student managers, and nearly 20 alumni of these institutions have gone on to careers with Aramark."



For more information about Aramark, please visit [www.aramark.com/highered](http://www.aramark.com/highered) and contact: Jeff Bohn, Director Business Development, [Bohn-Jeff@aramark.com](mailto:Bohn-Jeff@aramark.com) or call [\(616\) 546-5044](tel:6165465044).

**Aramark -- and all ACI Business Partners -- supports Associated Colleges of Illinois in two important ways:** first, by offering products and services designed to meet the specific challenges of higher education, and second, by making an annual commitment of \$5,000 that helps defray ACI's operating costs -- so philanthropic dollars can sustain mission-



critical programs. We encourage all ACI members to make our *Business Partners* their first call when they require the products or services these businesses provide. To learn more, contact ACI's Director of *Business Partnerships*, Jackie Meyers-Thompson ([773\) 293-7166](tel:773-293-7166), [jthompson@acifund.org](mailto:jthompson@acifund.org)

## Donor Spotlight



*Ross D. Siragusa*

**Siragusa Foundation preserves the legacy of a great Chicago entrepreneur by supporting ACI's *College Readiness and Completion Initiative*.**

Ross D. Siragusa did not have the advantage of a college education – and he had almost no capital when he launched an electronics business in the depths of the Great Depression. The son of Italian immigrants, Siragusa relied on determination and drive to grow that enterprise into Admiral Corporation, a global appliance business that was the first to produce affordable television sets.

Almost as soon as The Admiral Corporation took off, Siragusa developed a track record of civic responsibility and charitable giving, serving on the boards of and providing support to some of Chicago's key charitable, educational, and cultural institutions.

Later, in establishing **The Siragusa Foundation**, Siragusa described his intent. "We will enrich and enhance the lives of others by funding programs that help people help themselves."

**Today, The Siragusa Foundation continues to honor Ross D. Siragusa's commitment to his community, helping underserved people in Chicagoland help themselves and secure better quality of life.** Siragusa accomplishes these goals by funding – and partnering with -- organizations in arts and culture, environment, health, human services, and education. The Siragusa Foundation's education priority sets young people on the path to higher education by providing high school and undergraduate students with access to education and by funding scholarships for low-income, middle-income, and economically disadvantaged students.

**"Our founder was successful, yet he still believed that access to college would have made things easier," explains Sharmila Rao Thakkar, MPH, MPA, Siragusa Foundation Executive Director. "College opens doors we may not even know are there for the opening."** The Siragusa Foundation, she says, "believes that access to education and social services, self-sufficiency, and quality life are critical to family and community success. By supporting scholarships and college readiness programs, we can help reduce some of the barriers to achieving self-sufficiency and a better quality of life."

**Clearly The Siragusa Foundation and Associated Colleges of Illinois share a common vision – and ACI has long been one of the foundation's valued partners.** Over nearly three decades, Siragusa has invested \$220,000 in ACI's ***College Readiness and Completion Initiative*** and earlier programs addressing the needs of low-income and minority students. The foundation's most recent gift of \$10,000 provides \$5,000 in support to ACI's ***Summer Academy*** for high school students and \$5,000 toward scholarships for ACI's ***Peer Mentors***.

**Thakkar points out that research on college access, persistence, and retention supports the concept of ACI's *Peer Mentoring Program*.** "So much of college success is about resilience, social and emotional skills, not just academics or financial challenges. *Peer Mentoring* takes a holistic approach. It shows students where to go for

resources they need and how to stay connected to the community. It meets students where they are in terms of study skills, communications, and dealing with other issues. It gives them someone they can really connect with and trust.”

**In the long run, Thakkar sees ACI’s *Peer Mentoring Program* as a leadership development process.** “The next generation of youth has to be ready for leadership roles,” she says, “and leadership development involves more than being influenced by people with years of experience. Improving communications, exercising coping skills, and developing social and emotional strength – this can happen in your own cohort, at college surrounded by your peers.” The benefits of ACI’s *Peer Mentoring* extend beyond the individual students participating: “Education really has the power to exponentially transform not only an individual student. Think about the ripple effect that person has when they go back to their family, to their community, to their workplace and so on – those participating in this program can impact a world so much larger than just themselves.”

To learn more about how your major gift can create new educational opportunities for Illinois’ young people, please call ACI Executive Director Mick Weltman,  [\(312\) 263-2391, ext. 523](tel:(312)263-2391), or contact [mweltman@acifund.org](mailto:mweltman@acifund.org).

## Did You Know?

### **Surprising facts about the education outcome gap – across the nation and here in Illinois:**

- Although nearly 70% of U.S. high school seniors enroll in college within two years of graduating from high school, only about 57% complete degrees within six years.
- Among minority students, outcomes are even less encouraging: Only 36% of black young adults and 43% of Latinos who enroll in college complete degree programs in a timely fashion.
- Poverty is even more significant than race as a determinant of educational outcomes. Students from the highest income families are almost eight times as likely as those from the lowest income families to earn a bachelor’s degree by age 24.
- Illinois suffers one of the nation’s worst educational attainment gaps. Of 100 Illinois students who enter 9th grade, only 76 graduate from high school, 42 enter college, and only 28 persist beyond freshman year.
- Illinois’ white students are 28% more likely to go to college than blacks or Latinos.
- College participation for Illinois’ low-income students has dropped 5% in the past 10 years.
- Only 52% of Chicago Public Schools alumni go on to college, and of those who do, most choose colleges mismatched to their academic profiles and that have poor retention rates.
- ACI member colleges and universities graduate low-income and minority students at higher rates than do Illinois public institutions or other Illinois private colleges and universities.

Learn more about how ACI member colleges and universities deliver for Illinois students [here](#).



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*Augustana College ~ Aurora University ~ Blackburn College ~ Concordia University ~ Dominican University ~ Elmhurst College ~ Eureka College ~ Greenville College ~ Illinois College ~ Knox College ~ Lake Forest College ~ Lewis University ~ McKendree University ~ Millikin University ~ Monmouth College ~ North Central College ~ North Park University ~ Olivet Nazarene University ~ Principia College ~ Quincy University ~ Rockford College ~ Trinity Christian College ~ University of St. Francis*