

ACI Annual Benefit Reception Raises More Than \$90,000 for Peer Mentoring Program, Honors ACI Member Colleges and Universities

May 10, 2018



More than 160 people attended the April 20 ACI Benefit Reception in Chicago.

Associated Colleges of Illinois' (ACI) [2018 Annual Benefit Reception](#) raised important resources for its [Peer Mentoring Program](#) at its April 20 Benefit Reception at the University Club of Chicago. More than 160 ACI supporters and friends attended the event, which encouraged attendees to support underserved students at ACI's 24 colleges and universities.

ACI's Peer Mentoring Program is designed to help keep low-income, first-generation and students of color at ACI institutions and improve their graduation rates. Selected students are matched with trained peer mentors recruited from upper classmen of similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Mentors help mentees navigate the

critical first year of college, boosting their chances of remaining in college through graduation. This year, the Peer Mentoring Program has served 132 students, including 110 mentees and 22 mentors on nine ACI member campuses.

The reception raised more than \$90,000 for peer mentoring, and a matching grant from the [Council of Independent Colleges'](#) First Opportunity Partners Grant Program will add another \$32,000. ACI continues to raise funds for the operating costs required to fund the program at up to 11 member campuses in 2018-19.

Students' compelling testimonies were evening's highlights

Peer mentors from two ACI member universities told dramatic stories of their experiences. [Stephen Taylor](#) of [Rockford University](#) told the audience he grew up on Chicago's west side, wanted to go to college and jumped at a chance to play football at Rockford. But Taylor said "negative habits" led to his flunking out his first semester in college. "I was missing three things: A goalpost, a motivator and motivation," he said.

Taylor credited his mother and Dr. Karen Walker, director, Office of Student Success and Retention, Rockford University, for motivating and helping him successfully return to school. He got involved in ACI's Peer Mentoring Program at Rockford, designed specifically for minority males. Taylor described his role as "a guide and a motivator," he said. "If I would have had a mentor ... or had a program around



Stephen Taylor, Rockford University, participates in peer mentoring for minority males.

that would have provided me those resources in that community, I wouldn't have failed out my first semester," Taylor said. "Please – if your donations will help someone else like me finish and reach college completion, I say donate."

[Megan Jaboor](#), a peer mentor and nursing major at [Quincy University](#), said in her role as mentor, she has met regularly with five students and learned their stories. "I found my purpose as a mentor to be there for them," she said. "Some of my mentees do not have family support or anyone who has gone to college. Some have financial issues and others struggle with city life." College is challenging, and ACI's program offers personal support to participants, she said. Jaboor helped one nursing major/mentee study for an exam and talked with her about her sick grandfather. When the mentee passed the test, Jaboor said, "I couldn't have been more proud. Knowing that I was the first person she called meant a lot."



Megan Jaboor, Quincy University, is a nursing major and peer mentor.

Jaboor reminded the audience that many more students at Quincy could use extra help and motivation to succeed. "ACI has changed the lives of many, but most important, it taught me that with the right kind of coaching and determination, you can accomplish anything," Jaboor added.

Speakers encourage mentoring and financial support for ACI Peer Mentoring Program

Keynote speaker [Ana Dutra](#), CEO, The Executives' Club of Chicago, said she was fortunate to have mentors throughout her career, including "unexpected mentors" who helped her and her husband when they emigrated from her native Brazil to the United States. She urged students who benefit from the help of mentors to "pay it forward."

"For all the great advice you receive, for somebody who plays a role in your life, you have the responsibility ... to advise somebody else," Dutra said. "Mentoring is a two-way street. I've never had a mentoring relationship when I was a mentor or the mentee, when I was not giving and receiving at the same time."

[Dr. Jamel SC Wright](#), president of [Eureka College](#), was a first-generation college student. Mentoring relationships and encouragement were important in her college experience. Nearly two-thirds of the student body at Eureka College is first generation, many needing financial support while they study and seek opportunities for career learning, she said.

"Please continue to offer our students opportunities to intern with your companies. Offer them mentorship opportunities," Wright told the attendees. "If we are not committed, if we don't recommit constantly to events like this through associations like ACI, we will find ourselves farther and farther behind in the global context."

[Terri Diggs Norman](#), [ACI Board of Trustees](#) member, AT&T sales center vice president and a first-generation graduate, asked attendees to share stories or photos about ACI's Peer Mentoring Program on social media. "Ask your friends to support ... the ACI Peer Mentoring Program,"

she said. Her husband, [Art Norman](#), special contributor, NBC5 News, Chicago, said he needed mentors when he was a first-generation college student. He urged Benefit Reception attendees to reach out to help underserved college students. "All they need is a nudge. A push. A kind word," he said.

Financial support for the 2018 ACI Benefit Reception was provided by Patrons (\$10,000 each) Gallagher and Husch Blackwell. Partners (\$5,000 each) were Aon, Baker Tilly, GROWMARK, Robbins Schwartz and UPS. Door prizes were provided by Chicago Sinfonietta, Chicago Sky, The Executives' Club of Chicago and Shedd Aquarium.

The next ACI Benefit Reception is Friday, April 12, 2019, at the University Club of Chicago.