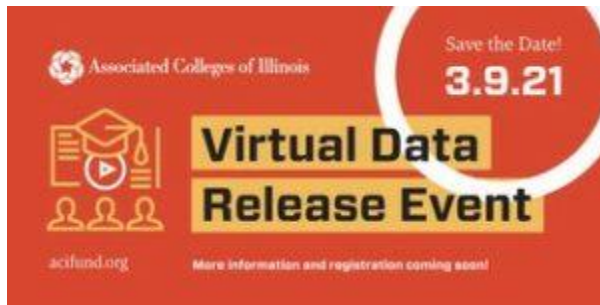


ACI Virtual Event Focuses Attention on Illinois Liberal Arts and Sciences Education, Data that Demonstrates Alumni Employability

Higher education, business leaders, student address education-business partnership

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Strong connections between Illinois liberal arts and sciences colleges and universities, and the state's business community, can keep more students in Illinois for higher education and help them move into promising careers at hundreds of Illinois-based companies. Higher education and business leaders spoke on the topic in a [virtual video event](#) March 9, sponsored by ACI.

Called "A Smarter Solution: How Liberal Arts and Business Together are Solving Illinois' Challenges," the online event was hosted by President Jamel Santa Cruze Wright of [Eureka College](#). Wright is also ACI president. "We can't do it alone and neither can the business community," she said. When educators and the business community to work together, they help students prepare for successful and fulfilling lives, and help the state work toward future growth and prosperity," she said.

Keeping students in Illinois for education and opportunities

Addressing the outflow of residents and students from Illinois to other states, President Philip G. Ryken of [Wheaton College](#) noted that the state's population has declined by nearly 300,000 people in the past decade, a high decline. About 20,000 are undergraduates who have gone elsewhere to study, he said. "It's a real shame to see students go to other places is because we have such excellent colleges and universities in the State of Illinois," Ryken said, adding this is especially true of ACI-affiliated schools.



President Jamel SC Wright of Eureka College, and ACI president, hosted the virtual event.

Kunal Kapoor, CEO of [Morningstar, Inc.](#), Chicago, and graduate of [Monmouth College](#), said the pandemic of the past year tested the value of a liberal arts and sciences education, available at ACI-affiliated schools. "It was a fantastic time to show whether you had learning agility, critical thinking skills, the willingness to adapt, and also the willingness to think about the future in entirely different ways than maybe you had envisioned," he said. A strong education system is key to Chicago's re-emergence as a vibrant city for economic and employment opportunities, Kapoor added.

Experiential learning a distinction of ACI students' success

"Our institutions emphasize experiential learning that is hands-on and project-based, so knowledge can be applied," said Teresa L. Amott, president of [Knox College](#). "Most important, we teach our students critical thinking skills – how to engage in rigorous questioning, how to

find, analyze and use evidence to communicate persuasively. These are the skills needed for lifelong learning." Many ACI schools provide mentors and guides, faculty and staff, throughout their college journeys, she noted.



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In his experience at [North Central College](#), President Troy D. Hammond said corporate partnerships are vital to preparing students for career success. With a grant from the Council of Independent Colleges, [ACI compiled](#) publicly available information from several sources including LinkedIn, he said. "The data shows that about 24,000 employees at those companies had graduated from 26 ACI colleges and universities," Hammond said. "And 148 Illinois companies employ at least 25 ACI alumni or more." Companies employing ACI alumni span virtually every industry and sector, with health care,

financial services and insurance in the top three, he said.

Chloe Overstreet, a junior at Eureka College and ACI board member, said her college experience has prepared her well for the future, and she hopes to remain in Illinois. "The focus in the liberal arts curriculum on more than simply content but transferable skills has forced me to use critical thinking, communication and analysis in every class I've taken here at Eureka. It is this focus on transferable skills that sets the liberal arts education apart from other schools," she said. Programs such as ACI's Work and Life Skills Boot Camps expose students to employers, who discuss skills they seek for in entry-level candidates to be successful, she added.

Mark A. Vargas, graduate of [Judson University](#), tech entrepreneur and ACI board member, challenged viewers to get involved with ACI programs that benefit students and hire graduates of ACI-affiliated colleges and universities. "Think about this: United Airlines, Google, Northrup Grumman, Walgreen's, Rush University Medical Center, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and so many other businesses that we recognize. What do they have in common? They've all hired ACI colleges and university graduates," he said.