



# The case to build great careers, meaningful lives and a strong state



**"I actually was the first one to finish college in my family. I wouldn't have been able to do that if it wasn't for all the help that I got . . . I'm very thankful and very appreciative."**

**— Student, Benedictine University**

## What is the opportunity?

Higher education is under pressure, especially small liberal arts and sciences colleges, and universities around the country — and in Illinois. Too often the focus is on the high cost of a college education rather than its priceless, lifetime impact on students, and their families. A college degree remains a key factor in achieving the American dream of access to opportunity and economic mobility.

However, for many first-generation and low-to-moderate income students, earning a college degree and achieving career success seems unreachable. Financial aid has not kept pace with rising college tuition, forcing students to take on large debt, which can require decades to repay. Further, these students have a rough road in obtaining satisfying post-graduation employment and launching successful careers. They often require extra support to develop the skills needed to successfully seek, interview for and obtain their first post-graduation jobs — and begin building careers.

And now add COVID-19, which severely affects students who are already experiencing immediate and extreme financial hardships, including food insecurity and difficulty paying rent and bills. Few resources are available to meet basic living needs of these students. Without sufficient financial support, students are at risk of leaving college. When students drop out of college, they are less likely to return and complete a degree.

"Hearing that I had gotten that scholarship meant so much to me, because it meant that someone had seen me and seen my life and seen my story."

— Student, Olivet Nazarene University

# How is Associated Colleges of Illinois meeting this challenge?

Associated Colleges of Illinois (ACI) is a unique collaboration of 26 private, nonprofit, residential colleges and universities throughout Illinois representing more than 70,000 students. Its mission is to support, "member colleges and universities by advancing independent liberal arts and sciences education and helping underserved students succeed in college, career and life." ACI achieves this by focusing on preparing a diverse student body to earn degrees, excel in the workforce and invest in their communities. Students thrive in the supportive, small-class environment and develop the key skills that employers demand — critical thinking, communication, collaboration, problem solving and civic competencies.

Throughout its 68-year history, ACI has invested more than \$70 million in scholarships and innovative programs for students, resulting in improved retention and graduation rates for first-generation and low-to-moderate-income students. Since 1990, ACI has awarded \$7 million in need-based scholarships to more than 3,000 undergraduate students, making it possible for them to begin or continue their studies, as well as strengthen the distinct education offered by Illinois' mission-driven, smaller independent colleges and universities.

Associated Colleges of Illinois graduates are well-prepared to secure professional positions and build successful careers, with more than 24,000 alumni employed by the 148 largest Illinois companies, contributing to the diversity and inclusion, and development of the Illinois workforce — and demonstrating the impact of our education model. ACI member colleges and universities make a \$3.75 billion annual economic impact in Illinois. Nearly 60% of education graduates and two-thirds of nurses in Illinois graduate from ACI member schools.

In addition to financial support, Associated Colleges of Illinois assists students with degree completion and career preparation through its programs, including peer mentoring (for underserved freshmen) and college-to-career initiatives (career fairs, boot camps, career mentoring and micro-internships).

## How can you help? [Click here to give](#)

We ask you to consider investing in Illinois' future leaders and economy through funding education for the many deserving, but financially challenged, students. ACI's goal for the next three years is to raise additional gift support for member colleges and universities that would provide more than 500 new scholarships for low-to-moderate income and first-generation students. These funds also will support Associated Colleges of Illinois' other programs.

Please join us to build Illinois' future talent.

### How can I get started?

For more information or to create an ACI Named Scholarship, please contact:

**Mick Weltman, Executive Director**  
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"Everything was rough. We didn't have enough money to pay for my school for next year. The scholarship made a huge difference. It's a huge stress reliever on my family especially since my mother is a single mother, and she's helping pay for school."

— Student, Illinois Wesleyan University



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