



Associated Colleges
of Illinois supports
member colleges and
universities by advancing
independent liberal arts and
sciences education and
helping underserved students
succeed in college,
career and life.



Associated Colleges of Illinois

ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020

Thank you

Dear Friends of ACI,

For all of us who support ACI and its mission, the coronavirus has re-emphasized and sharpened focus on the importance of our work. In 2020, COVID-19 negatively impacted students who already struggle with financial hardship and made it even more likely that they will drop out and fail to graduate. Furthermore, we know that two-thirds of nurses in Illinois graduate from ACI-member schools. So many of our health care workers of the future are also among those struggling.

But beyond the immediate crisis, we are gratified that for 68 years, ACI has been able to invest in young people. In the past 20 years alone, ACI has been proud to support our member institutions by awarding \$7 million in need-based scholarships to more than 3,000 undergraduate students, making it possible for them to begin or continue their studies. In addition to financial support, ACI has assisted 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). The key motives driving our work endure from year to year and remain at the center of our activities.

We celebrate the \$3.75 billion annual contribution to Illinois' economy made by ACI schools and their alumni, and we are thankful that together, donors, board members, member schools and the dedicated ACI staff can make a difference.

Thank you for sharing in this endeavor. We appreciate your interest and are grateful for your contribution.



Lyn Bulman
Chair, Board of Trustees



Jamel Santa Cruze Wright, Ph.D.
President



Mick Weltman
Executive Director

Highlights 2019-2020

ACI Colleges and Universities Diverse, Offer Wide Range of Academic Programs



Students attending the 26 ACI-member colleges and universities are learning in diverse environments and are afforded opportunities to learn that emphasize small classes, real-world project learning and a variety of internships, according to ACI research. ACI members are also producing teachers and health-care workers in larger numbers than the state's largest universities.

These findings come from a compilation of demographic statistics from ACI member schools (see <https://acifund.org/member-school-data/>).

Among the nearly 50,000 total undergraduate students:

- about 58 percent are women
- about one third are students who are American Indian, Alaskan or Native Hawaiian, Asian, Black/African American, Latinx or multiracial
- more than one third are eligible for Pell Grants, awarded to students with the greatest financial need
- more than 800 students are attending ACI colleges and universities with GI Bill benefits

ACI members, all private, independent institutions, have student bodies with characteristics similar to Illinois' public colleges and universities. 2018 statistics compiled by the Illinois Board of Higher Education for Illinois (IBHE) public colleges and universities show ACI schools have a slightly higher percentage of students who are women (58 percent to 51 percent). The IBHE statistics also show a slightly greater percentage of students of color or multiracial students attending Illinois public colleges and universities (37 percent to 33 percent).

At most of ACI's colleges and universities, top academic programs are business, education, health professions and basic sciences. ACI-compiled statistics show that ACI member institutions are graduating nurses and teachers at a nearly 2-to-1 rate when compared to Illinois' largest public and private colleges and universities.

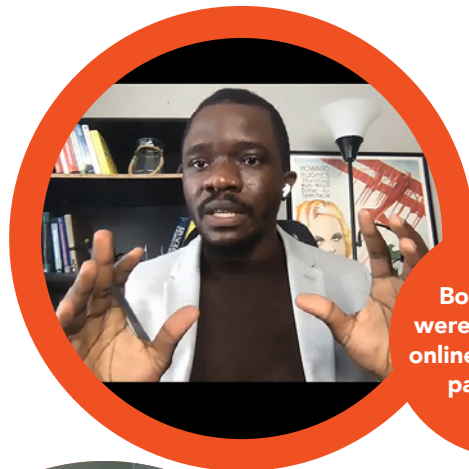
Illinois employment for alumni of ACI colleges and universities is strong, with more than 23,000 employees working for 148 top Illinois employers with at least 25 ACI alumni, according to ACI research. The top five Illinois employers of alumni of ACI-affiliated institutions are Advocate Aurora Health, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, State Farm, JPMorgan Chase & Co. and Caterpillar (see <https://acifund.org/member-employment-data/>).

ACI Launches Work and Life Skills Boot Camps

ACI launched its Work and Life Skills Boot Camp series in November 2019. Targeted to low-income, first-generation and students of color at ACI member colleges and universities, ACI's Work and Life Skills Boot Camps – held in person and virtually due to pandemic safety restrictions -- seek to enhance career development opportunities for these students as they prepare to enter the job market.

Through January 2021, ACI has held five boot camp sessions, focused on how a liberal arts education leads to a career, preparing for the job market, building portfolios and resumes, and interviewing skills. A session planned in March 2021 is focused on applying technology to career preparation.

ACI's Work and Life Skills Boot Camps were funded initially through a First Opportunity Partners grant from the Council of Independent Colleges with support from the UPS Foundation. Matching funds were raised by ACI, including generous support from Wells Fargo. ACI's boot camps are promoted to students through campus career services, multicultural and first-generation programs, and Peer Mentoring Program campus coordinators.



Boot camps were conducted online during the pandemic.



Students learned to get ready for the job market in an ACI Boot Camp session at Illinois Wesleyan University.

ACI's Career Development Conference and Employer Expo Builds Career Readiness, Offers Access to Prospective Employers

More than 100 students attended ACI's Career Development Conference and Employer Expo, Oct. 4, 2019, at North Central College, Naperville. The students met with 25 employers and graduate school representatives, and attended seminars on career paths in specific fields, plus networking, implicit bias in the workplace and financial literacy.

The students, from 13 ACI-member colleges and universities, were among 185 people who attended the day-long event. ACI previously hosted its first career fair and professional development conference at the college in March 2018.

Students said the conference gave them a rare opportunity to speak with potential employers and learn helpful career and life skills. For example, Concordia University Chicago junior Salam Hussein came prepared with a specific list of employers she wanted to meet. "I've been looking for internships, and as a freshman, it was really difficult to get one," she said. "One of the companies seemed very interested. I'm really looking forward to following up."

Matt Dee, a North Central College accounting, finance and economics major, said the experience was helpful, especially the "broader focus" with graduate program representation. "It's one thing to have a job fair where there are just employers," said Dee. "But it's great to have all these other opportunities to look at further enhancement to one's educational background."

Employers were pleased with many of the student candidates they met. "I've spoken to many viable candidates whom I'd definitely hire," said Stephanie Douglass of State Farm Insurance Co. Omar Coronado and Alexis Salvador, representing Wells Fargo, said they told students about the company's internships and collected several resumes for company recruiters. "It's great to see the level of engagement and students taking the next step," said Coronado. "We've been able to give feedback and discuss career paths."

Students heard a variety of speakers who discussed relevant skills and workplace topics. Among them were Michelle Silverthorn, CEO, Inclusion Nation, a diversity consulting firm and J.D. Gershbein, CEO, Owlsh Communications, an expert in marketing through LinkedIn. Skill-building seminars focused on careers in financial services, insurance and nonprofits, email etiquette, micro-internships, first-time job searches and building credit. Seminar sponsors were Baker Tilly, Fifth Third Bank and Upkey.

**Students from
ACI-member colleges
and universities met
directly with employers
at ACI's Career
Development Conference
and Employer Expo.**

Career Conference Employers

ALPFA (Assoc. of Latino Professionals for America)
Aon
Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Illinois
Buckeye International
Call One
CBRE
Central Intelligence Agency
CME Group
Consolidated Electrical Distributors, Inc.
Dayton Freight Lines
Environmental Design International
Fifth Third Bank
Inclusion Nation
Marsh
Northwestern Mutual
Owlsh Communications
Shure
State Farm
Wells Fargo
WestCare/Sheridan Correctional Center
Wintrust

Career Conference Graduate Programs

Dominican University
Lewis University
North Central College
Saint Xavier University



ACI Launches Fall Term Career Mentoring Program for College Seniors

ACI's Career Mentoring Program launched in September 2020 with 28 business mentors matched with at least 17 students from 10 member colleges and universities. The new program matches business mentors with college seniors to help the students prepare for careers after college.

ACI's Career Mentoring Program is a partnership with Mentoring Complete, a St. Louis-based firm with considerable experience in successful business and corporate mentoring programs. The Career Mentoring Program is designed so that participants and their mentors have consistent interactions to help students translate what they've learned in the classroom to the workplace. Mentors sometimes help the students find future careers.

ACI's Career Mentoring Program is funded in part through a National Venture Fund grant from the Council of Independent Colleges, Washington, D.C.



In the first semester of ACI's Career Mentoring Program, at least 28 business mentors were matched with 17 students from ACI colleges and universities.

ACI Welcomes New Corporate Partners

ACI welcomed three new corporate partners including Ardeo Education Solutions, Degree Insurance and Siemens. Corporate partners provide funding for ACI's professional development conferences, and they offer products and services relevant to higher education.

Ardeo Education Solutions is a company that partners with higher education institutions to provide Loan Repayment Assistance Programs (LRAPs) for students and for colleges. Degree Insurance is the first product in the U.S. that can guarantee a graduate's earnings in the five years after college. Siemens is a global technology powerhouse that has stood for engineering excellence, innovation, quality, reliability and internationality for more than 170 years.

ACI now has 10 corporate partners. Other corporate partners include Baker Tilly, Bon Appetit, Expense Reduction Analysts, Michael Best, PNC, Paycor and Sikich.



SIEMENS
Ingenuity for life

ACI Awarded Grant to Establish Leadership Council for Fundraising

The Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) awarded a grant of \$8,500 to ACI to establish a high-profile volunteer group, the Leadership Council. The council will comprise key senior leaders and influencers from corporate, civic, association and nonprofit organizations with a significant interest in liberal arts and sciences education. It is ACI's first volunteer board focused exclusively on fundraising.

Members of the council will provide financial support, lend their names to ACI initiatives, create and share testimonials and network with like-minded peers to make connections and raise funds for ACI. Kunal Kapoor, CEO of Morningstar, Inc., is among the early leaders of the Leadership Council. Kapoor is a graduate of Monmouth College, an ACI member.

The Leadership Council project is funded through a Capacity-Building Grant from CIC. The new council is a non-voting, non-governance volunteer board.

ACI Virtual Benefit Reception Raises Critical Funds Despite Pandemic



The COVID-19 pandemic forced ACI's 2019 Benefit Reception to become a online event, which launched in early May. The resulting Virtual Benefit Reception helped the organization raise about \$60,000 net through donations, greetings and sponsorships.

ACI provides scholarship funds to member colleges and universities to make available to students in need, as well as emergency financial aid, peer mentoring and other forms of support.

Speakers who presented during the Virtual Benefit Reception, from the upper left to right:

- Frank D. Cella, chair, ACI Board of Trustees
- Lyn Bulman, chair, Program Committee, ACI Board of Trustees
- Melissa B. Donaldson, vice president and chief diversity officer, Wintrust Financial Corporation
- Montse Cancino-Aguilar, Michele and Peter S. Wilmott, Student Leadership Fund scholarship recipient, Knox College
- Chandler Claudé, ACI Peer Mentoring Program, Monmouth College
- Chloe Overstreet, ACI Peer Mentoring Program, Eureka College
- Jamel Santa Cruze Wright, president, ACI Board of Trustees and president, Eureka College
- J. Vincent Williams, corporate trustee, ACI Board of Trustees

Sponsors were Aon, Fidelity Charitable, Gallagher, Husch Blackwell and Robbins Schwartz. The next ACI Benefit Reception is April 16, 2021.

ACI Board Elects New Officers

The ACI Board of Trustees elected Lyn Bulman, left, retired executive vice president of global human resources, Fellowes Brands, to a two-year term as board chair, effective June 1, 2020. Bulman, Oak Park, Illinois, has served as the board's Program Committee chair.

The board also elected Angela T. Allen, right, of Mitchell Titus, Chicago, as treasurer and Finance Committee chair. The board's other officer, Dr. Jamel Santa Cruze Wright, president of Eureka College, Eureka, remains as ACI president.

Bulman succeeded Frank D. Cella, who served from 2017 to 2020. "I am delighted to be taking this role," Bulman told the trustees. "I think ACI is a great organization. I'm very proud of the work that we do, and I think there's a lot of great progress going on that we can continue."



Lyn Bulman



Angela T. Allen

Eureka College Student Joins ACI Board of Trustees

The ACI Board of Trustees elected Chloe Overstreet, a student at Eureka College, Eureka, as the board's first student representative in ACI's 68-year history. Overstreet, from Stillman Valley, Illinois, is majoring in history and political science, and business administration.

Overstreet was elected in May 2020 at the board's annual meeting. She is a first-generation college student, who started her college career at Eureka shortly after her father died in a work-related accident. One reason she chose Eureka is because her college recruiter reached out after the accident and assured Overstreet the school would help her, she says. Once at Eureka, she joined ACI's Peer Mentoring Program. She began as a mentee and is now a mentor to incoming first-generation students.



As a mentor, she says she has had "an incredible opportunity" to watch classmates grow and be successful. Serving as an ACI board member will provide a student perspective and help other students access opportunities that ACI provides, Overstreet added.

Chloe Overstreet

Knox College Students Win 150 Media Stream/ACI Contest for Digital Art

Two students from Knox College, Galesburg, won the 2020 digital art contest sponsored by 150 Media Stream, Chicago, and organized by ACI. Odessa Sagli, Portland, Oregon, and Patrick Steppan, Chicago, who graduated, were awarded a total of \$3,000 by 150 Media Stream. Their project was featured on the 150 Media Stream art installation in Chicago.

The students' project focuses on ecological and environmental concerns. "The goal of this contest was to practice students' skills in creating digital art, to acquire experience in producing art in public space and to provide a prestige platform to showcase their work," said Yuge Zhou, curator

Sagli earned a Bachelor of Arts in Studio Art, with a minor in design. Steppan earned a Bachelor of Arts in Computer Science, with minors in art history and design. Tim Stedman, visiting professor of art, Knox College, supervised the students' project.



The winning art display from Knox College was introduced to the public in fall 2020.



Winners of the 150 Media Stream/ACI Contest for Digital Art were Odessa Sagli, left, and Patrick Steppan, both of Knox College.

Aurora University Returns as an ACI Member

The ACI Board of Trustees approved Aurora University's application to rejoin ACI, effective Dec. 1, 2019. Aurora and its George Williams College campus were instrumental in the formation of ACI in 1952. Both are charter members.

Aurora University traces its origin to the 1893 founding of a seminary in Mendota, Illinois. Today, the university operates two primary campuses: a 37-acre campus in Aurora, Illinois, and the 137-acre George Williams College on Geneva Lake in Williams Bay, Wisconsin. The university is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission to award degrees at the baccalaureate, master's and doctoral levels, plus certificates and endorsements. Aurora offers more than 50 academic majors and enrolls 6,000 students, with a 19-1 student/faculty ratio. Dr. Rebecca L. Sherrick has served as Aurora's president since 2000.



Name change for ACI member: Elmhurst University

ACI member Elmhurst College changed its name to Elmhurst University, effective June 30, 2020.

Elmhurst College President Troy D. VanAken said, "While this is certainly a new and significant development, it is the result of an ongoing, collaborative process." It reflects discussions how the institution can best serve its students for generations to come, he added.



Student Profiles



Tajania Jenkins

Augustana College

ACI General Scholarship

Major: Biology

Tajania Jenkins has a passion for science. Specifically, pathology – what causes diseases and their effects. Jenkins is a senior at Augustana College in Rock Island, where she will continue studying biology, preparing to graduate in 2021. Jenkins, who has two older siblings and one younger, chose Augustana because of its science programs.

"I chose biology because I've always been interested in science for as long as I can remember," she says. "I'm really interested in how things work, in terms of science or why things happen, especially in the human body." After she completes her biology degree at Augustana, Jenkins hopes to attend graduate school. From there, she has her eyes on a career in medicine, and sees herself working in a laboratory on human diseases, and consulting with physicians and their patients.

Jenkins is the recipient of an ACI General Scholarship, which helps her stay focused on her science interests. **"The scholarship is paying for my rent,"** she says. **"My parents and I don't have to worry about paying for housing until the spring. I was really thankful and appreciative of that."** The funds also help because Jenkins will soon be paying for test fees for graduate school entrance exams and graduate school application fees.

The scholarship has motivated her to help others. "It really inspires me to someday do the same for somebody else," she says. "I can help them achieve some of their dream."

See ACI's student profiles,
including videos online at
<https://acifund.org/student-stories/>

Michael Traversa

Benedictine University

McGraw Emergency Financial Aid Fund

Majors: Exercise Science and Sport Studies



Michael Traversa is working in jobs he had hoped for after graduating from college. A strength and conditioning coach at Benedictine University and Morton College in the Chicago area, Traversa says he's grateful for opportunities to work in his chosen field so soon after college. "That was the goal," he says. "I just didn't think I'd be so lucky that fast." Traversa explains that he and his four siblings were raised by their maternal grandparents. They made it possible for them to attend Catholic primary and secondary schools. After graduating from high school, Traversa started college at a Chicago-area university, but says he didn't do well academically. He left and took two years off from school before starting at Benedictine University in Lisle, Illinois, in 2015.

Benedictine was a good choice, he says, because it offered a new experience and it was close to Chicago and his family. He was also attracted by Benedictine's exercise science and football programs. Traversa played on Benedictine's football team for two years, most recently as a lineman and tight end. During his senior year in 2019, Traversa was presented the Tom Wirtz Award for Courage and Integrity, one of Benedictine's top awards for student athletes.

While he was a student, Benedictine University helped Traversa with scholarships and grants, but he didn't have quite enough to pay for tuition in his senior year. Traversa applied for an emergency financial aid grant from the McGraw Foundation, through ACI. With that extra help, Traversa finished and graduated in 2019 with a bachelor's degree in exercise science and sport studies.

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

"I hope that I can end up making enough money one day to give money back to students," he says. "It really truly is so crucial to some people's lives."



Andrew Payne

Eureka College

Peer Mentoring Program

Major: Sports Management

Andrew Payne always went to small schools, and he wanted to continue in a small college. That is one of the reasons he chose to leave his home in Indianapolis to attend Eureka College, Eureka. Another reason, he says, is that he knew President Jamel Santa Cruze Wright and Jessica Brown, dean of student services, engagement, and leadership, and director of residence life. Plus, he plays football at Eureka. In his freshman year, Payne played a lot of football. The Red Devils went 6-4.

Payne is a sports management major, the first in his family to attend college. Now a sophomore, he says he feels the responsibility and pressure of being first, because his mother, who cares for Payne's younger brothers and sister, has sacrificed a lot to help Payne get to college. "A lot of money is going into this. I have a job on campus. The financial aid people have helped me with a lot funds, grants and loans and stuff like that, so it's a lot of pressure on me," he says.

Dean Brown and President Wright encouraged Payne to join ACI's Peer Mentoring Program at Eureka College, designed to help first-generation students through the critical first year in college.

"It's not all about football. At the end of the day, I want to get set up for life, so OK, if it will help me in the long run, I'll do it. That's how I got into this program," he says. Through peer mentoring, Payne says he was able to attend an ACI Work and Life Skills Boot Camp at Illinois Wesleyan University. "That opened my eyes a lot," he says. "Like, what you have to wear for a job, and all the different expenses come when you're living on your own."

Payne is now a mentor in the program, which has taught him many other lessons, such as time management, organization and how to talk to people, he says. He says he's grateful for the Peer Mentoring Program because of what he has learned, and emergency funds he can use for food or for a bus trip home. "It is good to have that money just to lean back on, so I would say thank you for that," he adds.



Nicolas "Nico" Cardenas

Judson University
ACI General Scholarship
Majors: Psychology and Piano
Performance

Nicolas "Nico" Cardenas knew he wanted to attend a Christian university. Practicing their faith is important to him and his family, so they looked at several Christian-affiliated colleges before deciding on nearby Judson University. "What I really liked about Judson University was that it is a small university," Cardenas says. "The community there is very uplifting." Knowing and interacting with professors while studying for a degree was also an important plus, he says.

Cardenas, the youngest of two siblings from Streamwood, is a junior majoring in psychology and piano performance, with hopes of going into social work. "There are a lot of opportunities at Judson, such as working with the RISE Program or other places nearby that love to have Judson University students," he says. "I'm currently thinking about interning at the Boys and Girls Club in Elgin. That's kind of where I want to go, into social work or DCFS."

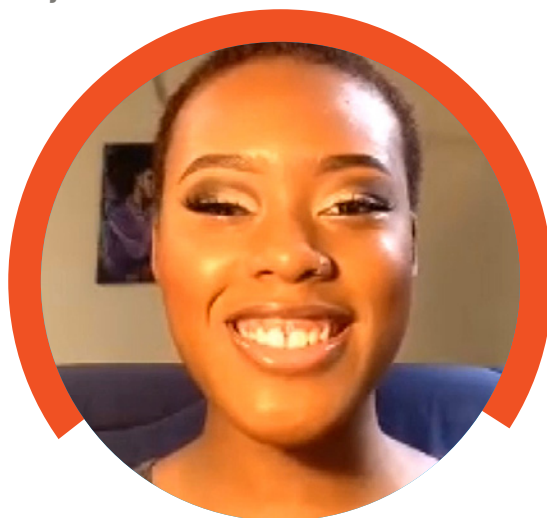
Cardenas' interest in psychology comes from his parents, who have done counseling through their church. In addition, Cardenas is a self-taught pianist and plays at his church. At Judson, he plays in a piano ensemble is learning how to read music. "I've been loving it ever since. They're developing this artistic sense in me," Cardenas says. He gets to share his musical talents with the university's worship team, and his band plays regularly at Judson's chapel services.

Cardenas and his father learned about the ACI General Scholarship through the financial aid office at Judson. "It's just been absolute blessing to have," he says. **"It's really cool to have extra support from someone who honestly doesn't know me, but yet they still believe in me."**

Cardenas explained that he helps support himself through a part-time job as a pizza-delivery driver, and his parents' help. To donors who support students such as him, Cardenas says their help inspires him. "Your donations, your support for me, gives me the desire to want to help people in the future to do the same thing that you're doing because you're heroes to us."

Vanessa Jackson

Knox College
CIC/UPS Scholarship
Major: Political Science



Vanessa Jackson remembers how she was greeted when she visited Knox College in Galesburg for the first time last year. "They paid for my train ticket," she says. "It was last minute. They got me connected with a host here. There were people to help me the whole day that I was here. They made sure I had everything I needed and more. They made sure I got back home just as safely as I got here. That is really what led me to Knox."

Jackson is a first-generation college student from Chicago. A sophomore majoring in political science, with minors in Africana Studies and English, Jackson recalls the encouragement to study political science and government she got from a teacher in high school, and the help she gets each day from the Knox community. The constant encouragement, she says, motivates her.

Jackson, who hopes to attend law school, says education is important in her family. Her parents didn't get the educational opportunities she has had. Moving in at Knox was a great and memorable day, she says. "My mom and my stepdad helped me move in, and afterward, my mom just sat there and she cried because she couldn't even think about how it would be for her if she went to college, but she was so proud that I was able to go to college." The oldest of four children, Jackson hopes to pave the way for her siblings to attend college, if they choose. Jackson finances her college education. She worked often last school year, but the pandemic changed that, leaving her short of money for tuition. She appealed to her advisor, financial aid staff and professors for help. "It's very important that I not only finish my education, but that I do it at Knox," Jackson says. With their help, she qualified for the CIC/UPS Scholarship through ACI.

"I am so appreciative for the scholarship and for everybody's help," Jackson says. She also appreciates the donors who help, too. "We appreciate so much their willingness to give when they don't even know us. It's really hard trying to get through college especially with the weight of the costs over your head. It's the reason why a lot my friends couldn't go to college or finish college because of the financial burden they had on them. It's very motivational to students like me, to know that somebody out there is willing to help."

Jequan Harrell

Millikin University
MD Designs Inc. Scholarship
Major: Business Management



Jequan Harrell wants to be in business for himself someday. Harrell, who grew up in Chicago and now lives in Blue Island, wants to return home after college, and use his business management education to create opportunities for his family and for people in the community – possibly in vintage clothing, or sportswear and sports equipment.

Harrell is a senior at Millikin University in Decatur. “I like the culture at Millikin. I have some fellow football teammates that went to Millikin, and they told me about the school, and they said it was a good school. It’s a great school for business, too, one of the top schools for business. I want to start my own business, so that’s what I came here for,” Harrell says.

“I’ve been living in Chicago all my life. I want to help Chicago, the inner city,” he says. “A lot of kids like myself, they don’t get a good opportunity to achieve stuff. I just want to help them and be able to create more jobs so I can help the youth.”

Harrell is the recipient of a scholarship through ACI funded by MD Designs, Inc. The scholarship is especially helpful because Harrell’s family isn’t able to provide much financial support. He relies on scholarships and other financial aid to finance his education.

“I use those scholarships to help with my book costs, my rent, stuff like that. It would be rough without it. I’m truly thankful for it. It really helped me pay off my financial aid,” he says.

Harrell plays inside linebacker on the Millikin football team and is coming off a year in which he led the team in tackles. “Football has played a part in my life in many ways since I was a kid. I started playing when I was in sixth grade,” Harrell says. He is also a skilled chess player and wants to start a chess club so he can teach the game to others. “It’s a beautiful game. I love chess so much,” he says.



Emily Barylske

McKendree University
ACI General Scholarship
Major: Psychology and Criminal Justice

Emily Barylske found success at McKendree University by focusing on how she could best contribute to the school’s volleyball program – not as an athlete, but as a team manager, “doing the background stuff,” as she puts it. With volleyball’s help, she has found success as a double major in psychology and criminal justice, and hopes to study abroad this coming spring before graduation. A senior from Benld, Barylske chose to attend McKendree in nearby Lebanon because it is close to home, she liked the environment and because the volleyball coach offered her a scholarship to manage the team, capitalizing on similar experience she had in middle school and high school. “It turned out to be one of the best things that I have ever done. Being able to travel and do all this? I love it,” Barylske says.

Psychology became a topic of interest for her because of her own experiences in high school, she says. “I knew right then and there, I wanted to go into psychology, and I wanted to help people who had been down that road,” Barylske says. Along the way, she changed her criminal justice minor to a second major, helped by an internship she served at the Lebanon Police Department. Her plans now? To become a high school guidance counselor and help students see the world of career possibilities.

The youngest of three children, Barylske says her family struggled financially in recent years. Her father faced job cuts in the railroad industry and now, a shutdown in the steel industry because of the pandemic. Except for some loan funds from her family, Barylske finances most of her own college education. One of her sources of funds is an ACI General Scholarship, which she has had for three years. “The scholarship really helped out this year. It has helped out every year,” Barylske says, adding that without the scholarship, she may not be at McKendree.

“I don’t even know how to express the words – how much it means to a student knowing their education is funded,” she says.

The spring, before graduation, Barylske is planning to study in Ireland at the University of Limerick, provided the pandemic doesn’t restrict her. Otherwise, she says she is considering another university in Australia as an alternative.



Chandler Claudé

Monmouth College
Peer Mentoring Program
Major: Accounting

Chandler Claudé graduated in 2020 with a degree in accounting from Monmouth College, Monmouth. A first-generation college student who became an ACI peer mentor, Claudé grew up on Chicago's South Side.

"I didn't know many college graduates in my area," he says. "Finding mentors was hard." His family was poor, and his mother worked three jobs to help him stay in a private high school. Although Claudé wasn't the strongest student in high school, he wanted to get a college degree to pay his mother back for her sacrifices.

At Monmouth College, Claudé says he "faced many struggles not fully understanding simple things like emotional intelligence, how to write an email to a professor, or develop effective time management skills." A few months into his freshman year, Claudé found a mentor, someone who truly understood the challenges he faced as a first-generation student. "We did homework together a lot," Claudé says. "He would text me to tell me to come to the library and get a study session in. My first semester I was able to get a 3.3, and I remember I was on Cloud 9. The hard work and accountability my newfound mentor gave me really started this."

The experience prompted him to become an ACI peer mentor. "I have learned so much about life and school, and I felt that I needed to pass it on to another first-gen student," he says. **"I wanted to be a cheerleader for someone because that's what I needed during my freshman year: having someone hold me accountable for study goals was important."**

Viviane de Castro

ACI General Scholarship
Principia College
Major: Mass Communication



For as long as she can remember, Viviane de Castro has been a competitor in sports such as gymnastics, soccer, volleyball or waterskiing. As a student at Principia College, Elsah, she's working toward a career in sports reporting, majoring in mass communication.

A junior from New York City, de Castro says her family is also involved in sports. Her parents are from Brazil. Her father was a professional volleyball player. Her mother was a professional dancer. Her siblings play sports. "Right now, I'm on the women's soccer team," de Castro says, adding that the COVID-19 pandemic has forced soccer games to the spring, complicating her ability to compete in other sports such as diving. She has also competed in beach volleyball and club waterskiing.

de Castro developed her interest in sports reporting in high school. She decided to attend Principia College after attending the Principia Upper School in the St. Louis area and because she practices Christian Science. "I'm just really grateful to be here," she says, because of the environment, small classes and the opportunity to play Division 3 sports.

de Castro tries to help her father with tuition costs with other sources of financial aid, including her ACI General Scholarship, awarded to her this past summer. "Of course, I was so excited," she says. "Who wouldn't want a grant? And, it definitely helped."

Without the scholarship, it would be harder on her father and other siblings, including a brother who is a senior in college and sister who is a high school senior. **"I don't know if I would be at Principia, if I'm being honest, without this scholarship, so I'm really grateful for it,"** she says.

de Castro is thankful for donors who made the scholarship possible. **"I've learned to value the gift of others and how much people give to people."** She also wants to be a donor herself and to contribute to those who have given much to her.



Malik Johnson

Rockford University
Peer Mentoring Program
Major: Computer Science

Malik Johnson will graduate in 2021 from Rockford University, Rockford. A senior computer science major, Johnson says he's interested in storage management. Along the way, he's been an intern at Commonwealth Edison, where he says he got good feedback, and a mentee and mentor in ACI's Peer Mentoring Program at Rockford.

Johnson, from the Chicago area, says he chose Rockford because of its small classes, and he's able to connect directly with professors and other faculty and staff. Plus, he plays a couple of defensive positions on the university's football team. "Football has always been my main sport," he says.

When he first came to college, Johnson, a first-generation college student, says he found it difficult to find resources, but found success by networking with others who had been to college. His family has also been helpful. "They let me know that I have their full support. And they always back me up with any decision that I make," he says.

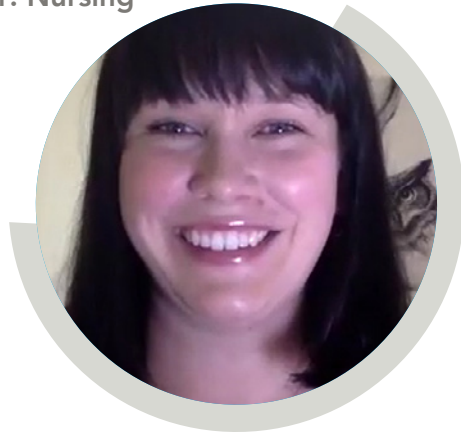
Johnson first learned of the Peer Mentoring Program at Rockford when a program mentor suggested he attend a meeting. "So, I attended the discussion, and then afterwards, I met with the administrator, Dr. Karen Walker, and I was motivated by her involvement here on campus," he says. Johnson is now a mentor to other incoming first-generation students.

The program has been helpful in many ways, Johnson says. "I learned that it's not always about you," Johnson says. "I learned to be less selfish and help others, because if it wasn't for this program, I wouldn't have had the help that I needed throughout my journey." Specific skills he learned from program are time management, plus study and business skills.

After college, Johnson expects to put his experience into practice. **"It definitely helped me. I feel like the networking has allowed me to meet important figures in different companies, that give good feedback on my work."**

McKenzie "Mac" Lagestee

Trinity Christian College
McGraw Emergency Financial Aid Fund
Major: Nursing



2020 has been a difficult year for McKenzie "Mac" Lagestee. Earlier this year, her husband was called to a two-year military deployment at sea. But the pandemic forced him and his unit back to the United States, to the Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) in Miramar, California. Soon after, a COVID-19 outbreak forced some 1,000 cruise ship passengers to be quarantined at the MCAS facility, and Lagestee's husband got sick with COVID-19 while helping deliver food and supplies to the quarantined passengers. In Illinois, Lagestee, majoring in nursing at Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, was laid off from her job.

Lagestee was at Trinity Christian College, in part, because family members had attended the college previously. She began her college years as a marine biology major because she liked the ocean and scuba diving. "I actually quit school for a while and moved to Hawaii for two years and became a dive instructor and tour guide on Oahu," she says. As much as she liked the ocean, Lagestee realized marine biology wasn't the best career path for her. So, she returned to Trinity Christian, focused on biochemistry, and then nursing. Plus, Trinity Christian College is a top Illinois school for nursing.

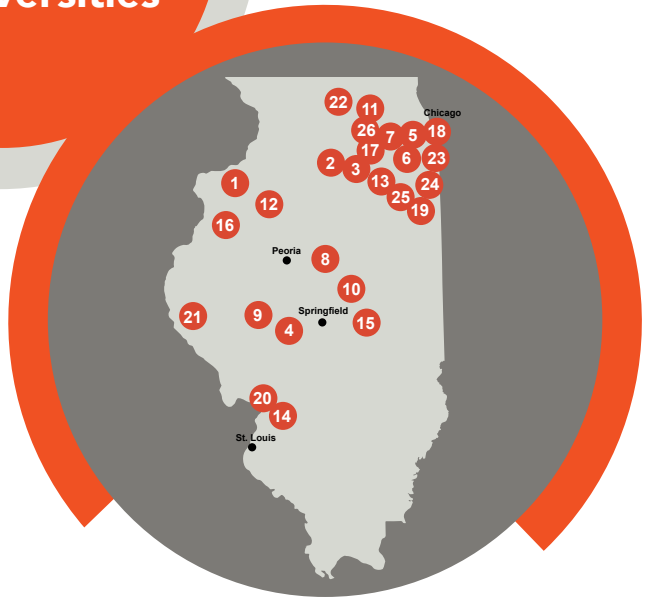
"My main goal is to become a pediatric oncology nurse," says Lagestee, a junior at Trinity Christian. "I definitely want to work in a pediatric hospital for a while. But right out of nursing school, I was thinking about doing travel nursing for a year to pay off student loans." Things were going well in clinicals earlier this year, too.

But then the pandemic hit. Her husband was sick, and Lagestee was out of work. It was critical that she remain in school to continue in the nursing program. She needed financial help and applied for a COVID-19 emergency student grant from Trinity, and was awarded a grant from the McGraw Emergency Financial Aid Fund, through ACI. The McGraw grant and other financial support she earned made a big difference, she says. **"If I and other didn't have that I probably would have had to take the year off,"** Lagestee says. **"There was no guarantee that if I did do that I would get a position in the nursing program next year."**

Lagestee's husband is now recovered and is still deployed. She is also working again as a caregiver, helping a specific client on weekends.

Lagestee is grateful for the help she got a critical time from Trinity Christian College, ACI and the McGraw Foundation, and donors. "I just wouldn't be here if it weren't for your donation. I wouldn't be able to become a nurse and help take care of others which is my pride, and I'm so excited to be able to do," she says.

Member Colleges and Universities



ACI Facts Did you know?

- ACI's 26 member colleges and universities provide a \$3.75 billion impact to the Illinois economy
- Nearly 24,000 alumni of ACI colleges and universities are working in 148 top Illinois companies
- ACI member colleges and universities graduate twice as many nurses and teachers compared to Illinois' largest public and private colleges and universities
- ACI's member colleges and universities award up to \$945 million in financial aid to students
- ACI-member schools serve more than 70,000 students. About one-third are students of color or multiracial students.
- Since 1990, ACI has awarded \$7 million in need-based scholarships to more than 3,000 undergraduate students.

1. Augustana College, Rock Island
2. Aurora University, Aurora
3. Benedictine University, Lisle
4. Blackburn College, Carlinville
5. Concordia University Chicago, River Forest
6. Dominican University, River Forest
7. Elmhurst University, Elmhurst
8. Eureka College, Eureka
9. Illinois College, Jacksonville
10. Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington
11. Judson University, Elgin
12. Knox College, Galesburg
13. Lewis University, Romeoville
14. McKendree University, Lebanon
15. Millikin University, Decatur
16. Monmouth College, Monmouth
17. North Central College, Naperville
18. North Park University, Chicago
19. Olivet Nazarene University, Bourbonnais
20. Principia College, Elsah
21. Quincy University, Quincy
22. Rockford University, Rockford
23. Saint Xavier University, Chicago
24. Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights
25. University of St. Francis, Joliet
26. Wheaton College, Wheaton

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A large orange circle with a grey ring around it, containing the text 'ACI Programs' in white.

ACI Programs

College to Career

ACI's College-to-Career Program reflects an emphasis on supporting students preparing to transition to careers and matching employers with talent emerging from ACI member colleges and universities. This effort addresses preparing students for future employment by building critical life skills, identifying career opportunities, networking with employers, and securing rewarding positions:

- **Career Development Conference and**

Employer Expo: This day-long talent and career development event combines skill-building seminars with a traditional job and internship fair for students at all stages of career preparation and for employers ready to hire interns and full-time employees. In October 2019, this event drew 185 people, including students from 13 ACI-affiliated colleges and universities. There were 25 employers and graduate school representatives, including 11 employers from Fortune 500 companies. ACI's next Career Development Conference is being planned for fall of 2021.

- **Work and Life Skills Boot Camps:** Boot camps help equip students to meet employers' expectations and build rewarding lives and careers. These sessions give students a leg up on successful job searches, networking, interviewing and workplace performance, as well as managing personal finances. Initial funding for this program was provided by a First Opportunity Partners grant from the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) with support from the UPS Foundation.

- **Career Mentoring:** With our partner, Mentoring Complete, seniors at member institutions develop mentoring relationships with successful business professionals who can help them build their brands and guide them through the basics of business etiquette and other key success factors. Initial funding for this program was provided by a National Venture Fund grant from the CIC.

To become a mentor, visit
<https://www.get.mentoringcomplete.com/aci-business-mentor>



• **Jobs and Internships Postings:** Employer-partners can place free, online listings of jobs and internships at <https://acifund.org/jobs-and-internships>. Career services professionals at ACI member schools promote these listings to encourage students to connect with employer-partners.

• **Micro-Internships:** These short-term, paid, professional assignments through ACI's partner, Parker Dewey, take place throughout the year and involve five to 40 hours of work. Students gain opportunities to demonstrate skills, explore career paths and build networks.

Employers connect to a skilled and diverse talent pool, improve the effectiveness of hiring efforts and lower the costs (and risks) associated with integrating new employees into their organizations.

• **ACI's Statewide Career Professionals Network:** ACI has built a network of career services professionals across 26 member campuses. Through annual surveys to assess needs and learn about challenges and opportunities in the field, ACI is creating new opportunities for employers to connect to this valuable network – and to thousands of students this network represents.

Emergency Financial Aid Program

ACI meets the financial needs of students facing unanticipated hardships that can disrupt their academic studies. This aid enables students from low-to-moderate-income families the opportunity to continue their studies without interruption.

Peer Mentoring Program

ACI increases the number of underserved college students to remain in school, succeed and graduate from ACI member colleges and universities.

The program matches underserved college freshmen with trained peer mentors from similar backgrounds who guide them through the critical first year at college. The retention rate for students participating in the Peer Mentoring Program is as high as 97 percent. ACI's Peer Mentoring Program operates on 11 member campuses, including Augustana College, Blackburn College, Concordia University Chicago, Dominican University, Eureka College, Millikin University, Monmouth College, North Central College, North Park University, Quincy University and Rockford University. The program serves a total of 156 students at the 11 campuses, including 130 mentees and 26 mentors.

Professional Development Program

ACI provides professional development opportunities to member college and university staff through twice-yearly conferences serving four special interest groups: advancement, finance, public relations and marketing, and student engagement. Combined, more than 240 people attended ACI professional-development conferences in June 2019 and November 2019.

Scholarship Program

ACI supports underserved students attending member colleges and universities. In the 2019-2020 academic year, ACI provided funds for 309 scholarships and emergency financial aid totaling \$527,200, funded by corporations, foundations and individuals.

Financial Information for June 1, 2019 to May 31, 2020

Financial information is presented for ACI's fiscal year ending May 31, 2020. Desmond & Ahern, Ltd., Certified Public Accountants, issued ACI an unmodified opinion on the financial statements.

As of May 31, total assets were \$1,728,414, while liabilities were \$710,552. Net assets were \$1,017,862.

Gifts, awards and other services totaling \$986,468 were distributed to members during the year.

Abbreviated Statement of Financial Position

Assets

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Cash | \$216,619 |
| Accounts Receivable | 177,000 |
| Investments | 1,118,857 |
| Property and equipment (net) | 4,331 |
| Other assets | <u>211,607</u> |
| Total assets | \$1,728,414 |

Liabilities

| | |
|---|------------------|
| Scholarships and other distributions | \$445,000 |
| Other liabilities | 265,552 |
| Net assets | <u>1,017,862</u> |
| Total liabilities and net assets | \$1,728,414 |

Abbreviated Statement of Activities

Support and revenue

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| Member assessments | \$648,600 |
| Contributions | 652,925 |
| Corporate partnership | 32,000 |
| Investment income (net) | 18,667 |
| Other income | <u>184,565</u> |
| Total support and revenue | \$1,536,757 |

Expenses

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Gifts, awards and other services to members | \$809,933 |
| Other programs | 176,535 |
| Management and general | 235,802 |
| Fundraising | <u>239,304</u> |
| Total expenses | 1,461,574 |
| Change in net assets | \$75,183 |

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They said it

"I learned that it's not always about you. I learned to be less selfish and help others, because if it wasn't for this program, I wouldn't have had the help that I needed throughout my journey."

Malik Johnson

Rockford University, Men of Color Mentorship Program, a part of ACI's Peer Mentoring Program

"I use scholarships to help with my book costs, my rent, stuff like that. It would be rough without it. I'm truly thankful for it. It really helped me pay off my financial aid."

Jequan Harrell

Millikin University, MD Designs, Inc.
Scholarship recipient

"The scholarship really helped out this year. It has helped out every year. I don't even know how to express the words – how much it means to a student knowing their education is funded."

Emily Barylske

McKendree University, ACI General Scholarship recipient

"It's really hard trying to get through college especially with the weight of the costs over your head. It's the reason why a lot my friends couldn't go to college or finish college because of the financial burden they had on them. It's very motivational to students like me, to know that somebody out there is willing to help."

Vanessa Jackson

Knox College, CIC/UPS Scholarship recipient

"Your donations, your support for me, gives me the desire to want to help people in the future, to do the same thing that you're doing, because you're heroes to us."

Nicolas "Nico" Cardenas

Judson University, ACI General Scholarship recipient

"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 from Benedictine and I got from the McGraw scholarship. I'm very thankful and very appreciative."

Michael Traversa

Benedictine University, McGraw Foundation
Emergency Financial Aid grant recipient



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