



Fall 2015

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Leadership Message

ACI Welcomes New Communications and Advancement Directors

Thank you for following Associated Colleges of Illinois' news and achievements through our quarterly newsletter. We're particularly excited as we head into the fall semester, because this September, two new professionals joined our team to help ACI grow:

Lauren Holhut, Director of Advancement – Lauren has extensive experience in fundraising and institutional advancement for some of Chicagoland's most prestigious not-for-profit institutions, including Infant Welfare Society of Chicago, the Newberry Library, Jane Addams Hull House Association, and Roosevelt University. Lauren will manage donor relations and develop new sources of funding in support of ACI members and programs.

John R. Brooks, Director of Communications – John is an expert not-for-profit communications specialist, whose professional experience includes a stint as Director of Media Relations for ACI member North Park University, as well as more than a decade in public and media relations for the national office of Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. John also is an adjunct instructor in communications at ACI member Concordia University-Chicago, and at Loyola University and DePaul University. John will oversee all ACI communications, including public and media relations.

We are delighted to have Lauren and John working with us, and we look forward to increased resources and higher profile as a result of their efforts.

Mick Weltman, Executive Director

ACI News

ACI wins \$25,000 Scholarship Challenge Grant from CIC

Now it's up to us to raise the \$25,000 match.

ACI can capture as much as \$50,000 in new scholarship dollars designated for rising sophomores who find themselves without sufficient funds to return to ACI-member institutions after their freshman year – thanks to a Scholarship Challenge Grant from Council of Independent Colleges (CIC). ACI will receive \$25,000 from CIC if it raises \$25,000 in new or increased gifts and grants for student scholarships by the end of the fiscal year.

“Financial concerns are the top reason why students leave college, with as many as 42% of them exiting for financial reasons,” explains ACI Executive Director Mick Weltman. “Research shows that only about 46% of college students say they have adequate financial resources to finish college. By growing our *Scholarship Program* with support from CIC, we can help put college completion within reach for hundreds of students who might otherwise give up on their college dreams.”

CIC's 2015 Scholarship Challenge Grants are awarded to state funds like Associated Colleges of Illinois and are designed to increase private gifts for scholarships for students at independent colleges and universities.

“Additional scholarship aid for deserving students is one of the highest priority needs at our member colleges,” observes CIC President Richard Ekman. “Our State Fund Members continue to address this need by raising both corporate and foundation funding that might not be available to the colleges otherwise.” CIC's Scholarship Challenge Grant program has accomplished this goal very successfully: Since the program's inception, in 2012, grant recipients have raised more than \$1.5 million in new scholarship money for their colleges.

ACI's campaign to meet the challenge grant currently is underway, with \$14,000 in gifts and pledges secured.

For information about making a gift to ACI's *Scholarship Program*, contact Director of Development Lauren Holhut at

Upcoming Events

ACI Professional Development Conferences – Fall schedule includes student engagement, presidents, and CFOs.

Save the Date: Student Engagement Conference – October 12-13, 2015

North Central College (Naperville)

ACI faculty and staff who work hands-on with low-income, minority and first-generation students at ACI member colleges and universities will convene on October 12-13, 2015 at North Central College (Naperville). Conference hosts are North Central's Dorothy Pleas, Director of Multicultural Affairs and Julie Caraballo, Director of First Generations Program; co-host is Quincy University's Tiffany Nolan, Vice President for Student Engagement & Success. Sessions will address collaborative approaches to improving retention and success of underrepresented students, edTPA: supporting teacher candidates; engaging students with disabilities; cultural competence; internationalizing graduate programs in education; and Title IX. For more information, contact: Tina Redmond at aredmond@acifund.org.

[Register for Student Engagement Conference](#)

Save the Date: Fall Advancement Conference – October 26-27, 2015

McKendree University (Lebanon)

Advancement professionals meet for their fall conference on October 26-27, 2015 at Quincy University, hosted by Quincy's Director of Annual Giving Vincent Piazza and his team. Sessions will address alumni engagement,

including engaging *young* alumni; using social media and text-to-donate for scholarship fundraising; and collaboration between major gift and planned giving professionals; and more, now under development. For more information, contact: Tina Redmond at aredmond@acifund.org.

[Register for Fall Advancement Conference](#)

Save the Date: Presidents Forum – November 3, 2015

Illinois College (Jacksonville)

Open only to ACI member presidents.

Sponsored by Rafter, Inc. (www.rafter.com), making course materials (and higher education as a whole) more affordable for students -- with a technology platform designed to manage all kinds of content (digital and physical) and help campus stores better face the future.



ACI will offer its first Presidents Forum on November 3, 2015. The forum will provide ACI-member presidents with an opportunity to explore critical issues facing private liberal arts institutions. Conference sponsor Rafter, Inc. and Illinois College will present a case study of their new partnership, which promotes student success by making course materials costs predictable, affordable, and accessible for every student. Through the Rafter360 books-in-tuition program, Illinois College can provide all students with 100% of their required materials for one low, flat rate.

Save the Date: Fall Chief Financial Officers Conference -- November 12-13, 2015

Dominican University (River Forest)



Sponsored by BKD (www.bkd.com), a trusted national CPA and advisory firm that understands clients'

businesses and delivers the resources they need with a service style they value. From Main Street businesses to international industries, BKD has the experience to help organizations grow and make important decisions.

ACI CFOs will gather for their first conference of the fiscal year on November 12-13, 2015 at Dominican University, hosted by Dominican's Amy McCormack, Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration, and Ewa Herdea, Associate Vice President for Finance & Controller. Confirmed presentations will include a session on enterprise risk management in higher education, as well as one on FASB (Financial Accounting Standards Board) and its relation to private higher education institutions, delivered by ACI *Business Partner* Baker Tilly. Proposals for presentations continue to be accepted. Contact: Tina Redmond at aredmond@acifund.org.

ACI Director of Conferences Tina Redmond is working with campus hosts to plan and organize the upcoming conferences. She is accepting proposals for conference topics and presentations. For more information, contact her at: aredmond@acifund.org.

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Donor Spotlight

McGraw Foundation honors Max McGraw's belief in the American dream by supporting ACI's *Emergency Financial Assistance Fund*.

Max McGraw was a self-made, self-educated man. The founder of two great companies – McGraw-Edison and Centel – he is remembered both for his entrepreneurial spirit and for his philanthropy. At Associated Colleges of Illinois, Max McGraw's memory is honored daily by students benefiting from ACI's *Emergency Financial Assistance Fund*, underwritten by the foundation that bears McGraw's name.

Established in 1948 with contributions from Max McGraw, his family members and



friends, McGraw Foundation giving addresses education at all levels, with a particular focus on higher education in science and environment. Since 1992, McGraw Foundation's generous gifts to Associated Colleges of Illinois' *Emergency Financial Assistance Fund* have helped keep low-income, minority, and first-generation students on the path to a college degree, even when emergencies threatened to block that path.



“Giving to ACI’s *Emergency Financial Assistance Fund* carries on a deep-seated commitment to the value of higher education from Max McGraw through his descendants to ACI students,” observes Gordon LaBounty, McGraw Foundation Executive Director. “So many of our nation’s low-income people and people of color have been marginalized for so long, and the McGraw *Emergency Financial Assistance Fund* gives them the opportunity to get an education, to pursue their careers and the American dream, and to more fully appreciate our wonderful country.”

Empowering individuals to pursue the American dream is a particularly apt memorial to founder Max McGraw. Born just after Thomas Alva Edison opened the first commercial power generating station, McGraw’s boyhood interest in electricity blossomed from dissecting motors and telephones to see what made them tick to serious study of every book available about electricity. As he matured, McGraw cultivated the entrepreneurial characteristics epitomized by his role model, Edison: a commitment to hard work, a deep belief in free enterprise, and a love of the United States and the opportunities it offers. Like Edison, McGraw began his career as a newsboy. Then, in 1900, at age 17, he took \$500 saved from delivering newspapers to establish McGraw Electric Company. From this platform, McGraw ultimately launched two of the United States’ largest and most successful businesses: McGraw-Edison Company and Centel Corporation. The former resulted, in part, from a merger with Thomas A. Edison, Incorporated, which brought the famous Edison Laboratories of West Orange, New Jersey into the McGraw family of companies. The latter evolved from a series of acquisitions of electric and telephone utilities in the upper Midwest, which were consolidated into one company that was the nucleus of Centel.

By 1978, McGraw-Edison, a manufacturer/supplier of electrical and mechanical products, was a diverse business with sales exceeding \$1 billion under such well-known brand names as Speed Queen, Toastmaster, Buss, Ingraham, Halo and Modern Maid. The company continued to grow through acquisitions and mergers, and by the time McGraw-Edison was acquired by Cooper Industries, in 1985, its 118 manufacturing and service facilities in the U.S. and abroad employed 21,000 people. Centel Corporation became one of the nation’s telecommunications

giants, with telephone, cable television, and electric power operations in a number of states. It was acquired by Sprint Corporation in 1993.



“Throughout his life, Max McGraw was a giver, not a taker,” LaBounty observes, “and he lives on through his corporate pioneering and the not-for-profit enterprises he started, including the foundation’s support of ACI’s *Emergency Financial Assistance Fund*.” Although McGraw did not attend college himself, giving to ACI is an especially appropriate memorial to him, says LaBounty: “Providing emergency assistance to minority and low-income college students is one way McGraw Foundation can help equip marginalized individuals to fully participate in the economy and to fulfil the American dream as our founder envisioned it. Without education, it’s difficult to accomplish those goals.”

Each year, McGraw Foundation makes an annual gift to for the *Emergency Financial Assistance Fund* (a generous \$95,000 in 2015). The fund is divided among ACI’s 23 member colleges and universities, and each can select recipients and award funds as needs arise throughout the academic year.

LaBounty explains: “The theory is that after other funds are used up, and a student still finds him or herself short of what’s needed to remain in school, then the McGraw *Emergency Financial Assistant Fund* kicks in – not to replace other monies, but to close the gap after other sources have been exhausted.”

LaBounty and the foundation board have seen first-hand the results of their investment in ACI students: “On two occasions,” he recalls, “ACI has brought to our annual meeting students who have done very well in their lives after receiving one of our emergency financial assistance awards. To help a student who is struggling to continue at college, complete their work, and go on to successful lives and careers – it feels good to be there at times of great need for these students.”

LaBounty hopes to continue the McGraw partnership with Associated Colleges of Illinois for years to come: “The

number of applications continues to be many times greater than the funds that are available, so that's why after 25 years, we want to continue as long as we can."

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ACI Scholars

ACI's *Emergency Financial Assistance Fund Scholarship* rescues students facing unexpected obstacles.

Max McGraw Foundation is literally changing the lives of students at ACI member colleges and universities by supporting ACI's Emergency Financial Assistance Fund. Over nearly 25 years, McGraw Foundation has helped write hundreds of moving stories of low-income, minority, and first-generation students whose college careers have stayed on track, thanks to McGraw's generosity. Consider these examples:

- **Michael's growing up has been a struggle.** A series of health care emergencies and financial setback cost his family their home and all their savings. After his father died suddenly of a heart attack, Michael and his mother were forced to move in with his grandparents. Staying in college seemed impossible – until a McGraw Emergency Financial Assistance grant helped ensure that Michael could continue his college education.
- **Diana has been supporting herself since age 18.** By working a minimum wage job 25-30 hours per week and with help from her boyfriend, Diana stayed on top of the bills and pursued her degree at an ACI-member college. But when her boyfriend lost his job, Diana faced a painful reality: If she couldn't pay for her dorm room, she was going to be homeless. A McGraw Emergency Financial Assistance grant kept a roof over Diana's head and kept Diana enrolled in school.
- **Evelyn know being a first-generation college student is never easy,** but things got even more difficult this year, when both her parents lost their jobs. Evelyn had no idea where her tuition money would come from – until she applied for and received an ACI-McGraw Emergency Financial Assistance grant. Now Evelyn's

future feels much more secure.

Max McGraw Foundation led the way in establishing the ACI *Emergency Financial Assistance Fund* that helped Michael, Diana, and Evelyn stay in school. In 2014, Fifth Third Bank grew the fund with a \$25,000 gift. Together, these generous donors are helping ensure that unexpected events – from illnesses to tornados – do not derail the college careers of low-income, minority and first-generation students at ACI member colleges and universities. For information about supporting ACI’s *Emergency Financial Assistance Fund*, contact Director of Development Lauren Holhut at lhohut@acifund.org or by phone at: (312) 263-2391, ext. 538.

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Featured ACI Programs

Peer Mentoring Program – College Changes Everything™ Conference

Representatives of ACI’s three *Peer Mentoring Program* campuses reported on their efforts and their results at the College Changes Everything conference, sponsored by Illinois Student Assistance Commission on July 16, 2015, in Tinley Park. ACI speakers included Mary Windeknecht, Director of First Year Advising, Augustana College; Angela Frazier, Assistant Dean of Advising Services, Dominican University; Barrington Price, Director of Student Success, North Park University, and Anne P. Deeter, Assessment Coordinator, Dominican University. Although each institution approaches *Peer Mentoring* somewhat differently, all build on the same theory of change: College persistence among low-income, first generation college freshmen increases when trained and supervised peer mentors from similar high school backgrounds provide intentional and personalized connections to campus support services, building a bridge to the campus community and facilitating early, individualized interventions.

The ACI team presentation, “Transition and Transformation – How Peer Mentoring Helps At-Risk Students Reimagine College and Themselves,” explained how ACI’s *Peer Mentoring Program* helps at-risk students overcome social isolation and lack of familiarity with campus life, language, and culture in order to persist and complete degrees. The session illustrated how Peer Mentors reach beyond logistical support to promote personal

transformations that change how students see themselves, academic achievement, social and family life. Among the successes reported: 1) More than 90% of mentee-participants said that they program had been valuable to them and that they had taken advantage of college support services, and 100% said they knew where to find college support services. 2) 73% of freshmen mentored in 2014-15 were planning to return for sophomore year this fall.

The 2015 College Changes Everything™ conference was the fifth such conference. The state's premier college access and success event, the conference focused on effective practices and showcased resources available to support the state's Goal 2025: Increase the proportion of adults in Illinois with high-quality degrees and credentials to 60% by 2025. This year's conference convened a diverse audience of more than 400, including both college and high school leaders, counselors, and case managers, as well as representatives of government, not-for-profits, and communities from across the state. **College Changes Everything™** is a college access movement initiated by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission. It is an essential part of helping the State of Illinois reach Goal 2025.

Conservation Career Path Project

Nearly 80 students at ACI colleges and universities have explored careers in land and resource conservation since 2010, thanks to ACI's partnership with the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation. Designed to develop the next generation of conservation leaders, ACI's *Conservation Career Path Project* helped not-for-profit conservation organizations develop a pool of trained generalists, managers, and volunteers by providing paid internships. These internships exposed ACI students to hands-on experience in the comprehensive management and organizational skills essential to not-for-profit organizations, as well as knowledge and skills specific to conservation organizations. The program, which concluded in August 2015, not only gave students the chance to explore the wide range of leadership opportunities available in conservation organizations, but also facilitated successful transitions from college into the 21st century green workforce.

Conservation Career Path students served a nine-week paid internship on-site at one of 18 conservation organizations. ACI provided students with a one-day orientation to review positive workplace behaviors, writing effective work plans, and principles of not-for-profit fundraising. During the internships, students journaled about their experiences, prepared a work plan documenting their outcomes and performance indicators, and delivered a

presentation on lessons learned and skills acquired.

Launched in 2010 with generous funding from the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, ACI's Conservation Career Path Project served 79 students in six cohorts, including 14 interns who completed the program in summer 2015. Students represented Augustana College, Aurora University, Concordia University, Dominican University, Knox College, Lake Forest College, Lewis University, Monmouth College, Millikin University, Olivet Nazarene University, North Central College, North Park University, and University of St. Francis. Interns served in 18 different conservation organizations in metro Chicago, including Chicago Zoological Society/Brookfield Zoo, Chicago Botanic Garden, the Forest Preserve Districts of Cook, DuPage, and Lake Counties, Friends of the Chicago River, Morton Arboretum, Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, and many more.

In post-program surveys, Career Path Project interns registered extremely positive reactions to the program: “This internship has shown me the diversity of jobs related to conservation and environmental science and has given me useful experience in the field of environmental monitoring.” “This internship showed me an example of working in nonprofits. I think the greatest impact was confirming that I want to work in a nonprofit, and that it's possible for me to do so.” “This internship...solidified my career path and showed me that conservation is actually something I really would like to go in to. Not one of my days...felt like ‘work’ to me because I was out in an environment that I loved every day.”

ACI's Summer Academy at Trinity Christian College

Forty-five rising high school juniors from Chicago's Noble Network of Charter Schools traveled to Trinity Christian College (Palos Heights, IL) to attend ACI's 2015 Summer Academy, July 12-17. *Summer Academy* provides real-world experience in both college-level academics and campus residential and social life, while offering valuable insights into each student's academic and personal development.

At Summer Academy 2015, students chose to attend two of three courses taught by Trinity faculty: college math, physical science, and intro to graphic and web design. They also benefited from one-on-one coaching sessions, a career roundtable exploring a variety of career paths, and a sampling of social activities available on college campuses. Trinity Christian's Director of Community Engagement and Diversity Programs, Tabitha Matthews, coordinates ACI's *Summer Academy*. She says the coaching sessions were particularly rewarding

for *Summer Academy* attendees. “During these sessions,” explains Matthews, “mentors facilitated individual conversations and group activities that really helped students think critically about their journey toward higher education.” Similarly, the career roundtable featured individuals from a variety of fields sharing their own personal and professional journeys and answering students’ about college preparation and completion. “For our *Summer Academy* students,” says Matthews, “this was a real highlight.

ACI’s *Summer Academy* is a partnership among ACI, Trinity Christian College, and Noble Network of Charter Schools, a non-selective, public high school network serving more than 10,000 students on 16 campuses throughout Chicago. More than 90% of Noble graduates matriculated to college in 2015. Of 2015 *Summer Academy* attendees, 33 are juniors at Noble’s Muchin College Prep, and the remaining 12 attend six other Noble Network high schools around the city. Of the 45, 55% are female, and 44% are male. The majority -- 66% -- are Latino, 32% are African American, and 2% are Asian American. Most are from low-income families and will be the first in their families to attend college.

“We know from assessments of past *Summer Academies* that participants increase their confidence that they can attend and graduate from a four-year college,” observes Mark Hanna, Dean of Students. “Students gain valuable exposure to college level faculty and hear/see college students from backgrounds similar to their own who are demonstrating the ability to navigate and move successfully through the campus environment.” *Summer Academy*, says Hanna, helps students understand the various types of post-secondary education available, especially the small, private liberal arts colleges that make up Associated Colleges of Illinois. “Students often arrive with perceptions of higher education that are formed by their awareness of Ivy League and/or large research institutions,” Hanna observes. “Our hope is to educate them to the importance of fit in college choice.”

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Building ACI Business Partnerships

BAKER TILLY’s higher education practice helps colleges and universities benchmark

against the field and adapt to change

Chuck Droege has observed and supported the field of higher education for most of his career. Now head of the audit group for ACI Business Partner Baker Tilly's Chicago office, he also serves as lead partner for the firm's nationwide higher education practice, which has a particular focus on private liberal arts education.

Droege's engagement with higher education began in the early 90s, when he became a lobbyist for students at University of Wisconsin in the early 90s. "Even then," he says, "I was already telling people: Here's the curve of costs; here's the curve of federal aid; the gap is getting wider and wider. It was obvious we were headed for trouble." Today, Droege says the landscape is even more complicated: "The volatility of investments in the general economy is squeezing higher education institutions," he observes. "People relying on endowment and expecting a steady rate of return over the past 10 years know that's not going to work. Meanwhile, there's increased scrutiny from regulators, pressure from the general public regarding how high tuition can go. But the reality is that colleges need the revenue in order to increase services and capital investments, and if they don't make those improvements, they can't be competitive. There are no easy answers."

Droege and his team at Baker Tilly work with client colleges and universities to search for those answers. The firm's dedicated higher education practice serves more than 275 higher education and research institutions across the United States. These client institutions turn to Baker Tilly to address strategic and tactical concerns. The team's knowledge of the unique higher education culture allows it to effectively collaborate with management, internal audit functions, boards, and audit committees to devise customized solutions for auditing, tax, and consulting needs.

Chuck Droege highlights three areas in which Baker Tilly can be particularly helpful to colleges and universities:

1. **Benchmarking** – "Baker Tilly sees how many different institutions address similar issues," says Droege, "so we can help people understand what others are doing in the field and determine how those examples will influence their course of action."
2. **Technology and cyber security** – "As more colleges look to expand online education and on campus networks, they are finding themselves under attack from the outside," Droege observes. "They need comprehensive cyber security analyses, and particularly in smaller institutions, it's very uncommon to have in-house staff prepared to identify where the risks lie and shore up cyber security. Baker Tilly can provide that

support.”

3. **Audit** – Droege warns that fairly significant changes are coming with regard to financial reporting. “The new financial reporting structure gets away from unrestricted, temporarily restricted, and permanently restricted funds and shift to a bifurcated system – restricted and non-restricted. We’ll also see changes to statements of cash flow,” Droege says. “No one knows exactly when this will happen, but it will occur in the near future, and because Baker Tilly specializes in the area, because we deal with hundreds of these audits, we’ll be able to help people change their general ledger structure to meet those new requirements.”

Founded in 1931, Baker Tilly is among the top 12 largest accounting and advisory firms in the U.S., and is an independent member of Baker Tilly International. The world’s eighth largest accountancy and business advisory network of independent members, Baker Tilly International includes 154 firms operating in 133 countries, with combined revenue of \$3.6 billion and more than 27,000 people collaborating to serve clients around the globe.

For more information, please visit www.bakertilly.com or contact: Chuck Droege, CPA, at charles.droege@bakertilly.com or call (312) 729-8008.

Baker Tilly – 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 Executive Director, Mick Weltman, at mweltman@acifund.org or call (312) 263-2391, ext. 523.



Meet ACI Members

TRINITY CHRISTIAN COLLEGE (Palos Heights, Illinois): New president of ACI's youngest college brings a business perspective to advancing the liberal arts tradition.

Kurt D. Dykstra never expected to be a college president, but last spring when the opportunity came to lead Trinity Christian College, he welcomed the challenge. Dykstra had built a successful legal career, had managed a financial institution, and was mayor of Holland, Michigan, and while he may be a somewhat unconventional choice as Trinity's eighth permanent president, for this youngest ACI college (established in 1959), Dykstra's appointment makes good sense: "Because Trinity Christian is a young institution, we're not mired in the 'we've always done it this way' approach to management," observes Dykstra, "so there's more room to maneuver as we face the future. There's an opportunity to bring to the table innovative ideas that are working in the public sector and in private business and could produce positive results for private liberal arts education."

Liberal arts education has been the stuff of dinnertime conversation in the Dykstra household ever since Kurt and Leah Dykstra graduated from Northwestern College, a small Iowa Christian college much like Trinity. Kurt Dykstra went on to law school, while Leah launched a career in admissions counseling – first at the Dykstras' alma mater and later at Hope College (Holland, Michigan), where Kurt taught business law and political science classes. Kurt Dykstra became mayor of Holland in 2009 and served until 2015, when he came to Trinity.

"Three things influenced me to accept the presidency here at Trinity," observes Dykstra. **"First, my own experience as a first generation grad myself, knowing the impact that a liberal arts education had on my life.** It drove my passion for higher education generally and for liberal arts education specifically. Second, our family has been around the college setting for most of the past 22 years. Being involved with college students has enriched our lives in so many ways, including influencing the kind of people with whom we've been friends. And finally,"

concludes Dykstra, “it feels like coming to Trinity Christian College draws on the totality of my experience and on my commitment to provide leadership in the legal, public, and non-profit sectors.”

Dykstra acknowledges that the current environment places extraordinary demands on leadership in higher education. “College costs have long been a topic of discussion, but even more so since the recession,” he says. “There’s been rapid tuition inflation since 2008, and we know that higher education costs can’t continue to rise at the same pace. You try not to take the ‘sky is falling’ position, but you can’t say ‘no problem,’ either. The guardrails just aren’t there for smaller schools like Trinity that don’t have billion dollar endowments, especially when there’s also this intense focus on experiential learning and on what kind of job graduates can secure after they invest in a degree.”

Serving as an elected official in Michigan provided good training for Dykstra’s new role at Trinity Christian College. “Michigan never really recovered from the 2001 recession, and the state has faced more than a decade of difficulties – shrinking revenues, declining property values, significant pressures on municipal budgets,” explains Dykstra. “So my entire time in public government was spent figuring out sustainable models for operating; identifying the essential, optional, and discretionary; and finding new ways to enhance efficiencies so we could do at least as much as we had always done -- with fewer resources. Our municipality emerged stronger than before and on a sustainable path for the future.”





Dykstra finds that the same principles apply to managing a small, private liberal arts college in today's environment. “We know we can't raise tuition every year, and with discount rates going up as well, we have to find ways to adhere to mission, not allow dollars and cents to completely rule the day, but find ways to be sustainable,” observes Dykstra. “We have to come up with creative ways to run some of our programs. For example, historically Trinity's adult studies programs have operated as stand-alone entities, separate from the larger college, with individualized admissions and marketing programs. Now we're looking at how we run those programs organizationally and institutionally, finding ways to fold them into the broader administration to free up resources for the classroom.”

Dykstra credits his wife, Leah, for deepening his commitment to liberal arts education. “It's difficult to overstate how influential my wife's experience has been on me,” he acknowledges. “Throughout her career, we've talked daily about the value of liberal arts in a society that seems to prefer technical education; how to talk about that balance of cost and value; how liberal arts colleges can position themselves to remain relevant in a marketplace that seems to value the traditional liberal arts experience less and less. Both Leah and I believe that in a society that is ever more complex and ever more connected, liberal arts education is more valuable than ever before. We think that investing in the liberal arts experience at Trinity Christian College represents the best value available in the marketplace.”

Trinity Christian College grew from the commitment of a visionary group of young business leaders who, in

1956, determined it was time to organize a Christian college for Chicagoland. The college's first board of trustees was elected in 1959. After purchasing and remodeling the club buildings of Navajo Hills Golf Course in Palos Heights, Illinois, the college opened that fall as a two-year institution, with a class of 37 students taught by five faculty. In 1966, the board began transitioning Trinity to a four-year, degree-granting institution, and Trinity awarded its first baccalaureate degrees in May 1971. Trinity added its Adult Studies Accelerated Program in 1999, offering degrees in business, education, and special education. Regularly ranked by U.S. News & World Report in the top tier of the Midwest's regional colleges, today Trinity Christian College offers 80+ programs of undergraduate study and master's degree programs in counseling psychology and special education, taught by professors who integrate a Christian worldview into the curriculum. Trinity now serves a diverse student body of more than 1,400, both residents and commuters, who describe experiencing a nurturing environment and a sense of community as they pursue their education while broadening their knowledge of God, neighbor, and self.

For more information visit: www.trnty.edu

BLACKBURN COLLEGE (Carlinville, Illinois): At one of seven U.S. 'Work Colleges' students earn their way to a college degree.

In 1913, Dr. William Hudson took up the challenge of re-energizing Blackburn College (Carlinville) by launching the **Student Self-Help Plan**, an innovative effort to employ students to help operate the college, reduce operating costs for the then-struggling institution, and ensure affordable higher education for students of limited income. Now, 100 years later, Hudson's Student Self-Help Plan is the Blackburn College Work Program, and Blackburn is one of only seven U.S. colleges officially designated by the federal government as a "Work College."



Work Colleges are a distinct category of four-year liberal arts colleges that purposefully integrate work and

learning to deliver top-notch education, while preparing students with real work experience, and both practical and “soft” skills employers seek. At Work Colleges, all resident students must work (at Blackburn, a minimum of 10 hours per week), regardless of their ability to pay tuition. Students perform essential functions across their campus, and because their labor promotes operational efficiency, tuition is lower than at other colleges, and Work Colleges are more affordable. In fact, U.S. News and World Report identifies Blackburn College as one of the Midwest’s best values for higher education. “Blackburn is priced well below all the other private institutions,” says President John Comerford, “so we provide more affordable access to a small, private liberal arts environment.”

Affordability is key to Blackburn College’s growth strategy. Since 2013, Blackburn specifically targeted first-generation and low-income students. “There’s a saying that is part of Blackburn’s history and still applies today,” says Comerford. “We serve the students who have everything they need to go to college – except money.” Blackburn’s commitment to low-income students and its distinctive Work Program make it possible for students who score “\$0” for Expected Family Contribution on their FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) to attend college tuition-free. “We can do that,” explains Comerford, “because when we combine what students earn from their work grants and what they receive in federal and state financial aid with federal subsidies we receive as a Work College, Blackburn earns the same revenue from a student paying zero tuition as we do from every other student -- so Blackburn can be tuition-free for the neediest students,” concludes Comerford, “and we’re the only the college in the state doing that.”

Blackburn students work at dozens of different jobs organized into 12 work areas, ranging from dining and hospitality services to physical plant maintenance, campus security, information technology, and teaching and research assistantships. “We’re the only college in the country where most of the buildings were built by students,” observes Comerford. “When we build or renovate, if time allows, we use student labor. It’s a great experience for them. It’s cost-efficient, and it builds a sense of ownership on campus. Alumni come back and say, ‘I built that building, See that wall? I built that.’” Currently, Blackburn students are providing most of the labor on two major projects: converting a student center into an alumni center and completing a \$1 million renovation of its library.

“Ours is the only Work College Program managed by students,” explains Comerford. “New students start in more labor intensive jobs and then work into management. Of course, there’s faculty oversight, but two seniors manage the entire work program, and when problems come up, the 12 student-managers meet to discuss real-

world personnel problems, such as sexual harassment. Our 20-year-old students wrestle with issues most people don't confront until many years into their careers. I've been to one of those Work Committee meetings," says Comerford, "and it was as good a human resources discussion as I have ever been a part of."



"Every job is designed with a specific set of learning outcomes," explains Comerford. "Our students learn to show up on time, to communicate well with peers and supervisors and to work as a team, to receive and to give useful feedback – and these learning outcomes build one on top of the other over time, so that by the time students are seniors they're leading and supervising other younger students just beginning the process. We document outcomes on a work transcript for each student, so Blackburn alumni can say to an employer: I learned all those soft skills you say you want, and I can prove it."

Of course, the Work Program affects who chooses to attend Blackburn. "A student looking for a four-year party is not likely to come here," acknowledges Comerford. "Our students tend to be ready to be serious about their academics and co-curricular work. You just don't pick a work college for the party."

Similarly, the Work Program influences who Blackburn hires to staff the institution. Comerford comments: "When we hire someone here, it's with the understanding that no matter the job, you are an

educator. You could be coming on board as the HVAC supervisor, but at Blackburn you will be training a crew of

students to work alongside you to maintain the equipment, so that makes you an educator, and you have to really like working with young people.” Comerford acknowledges the arrangement “can be a double-edged sword. There are times when it just would be easier to do the job yourself than to teach a student to do it, but in the long-run, the investment in our students pays off. Over time, students become increasingly competent, and increasingly helpful in getting the job done, and they take those skills with them as they move through and beyond their career at Blackburn.”

Beyond student’s college careers, Blackburn’s results demonstrate the continued value of a liberal arts education in today’s job market. “We survey our students six months after graduation,” says Comerford. “Among the class of 2014, 98% were full-time employed or in graduate school, and we had a 98% response rate to our survey. We tracked almost every one of our 2014 grads, and we know the Blackburn model works, that it makes a meaningful difference in outcomes at the end of students’ academic career.”

Now the White House and national policy-makers are considering how Blackburn College and its fellow Work Colleges might address the issues of college costs and college debt. Writing in the St. Louis-Dispatch in August 2015, columnist Chuck Raasch asked, “Are Work Colleges like Blackburn the answer to rising higher-education costs?.”

[Read more.](#)

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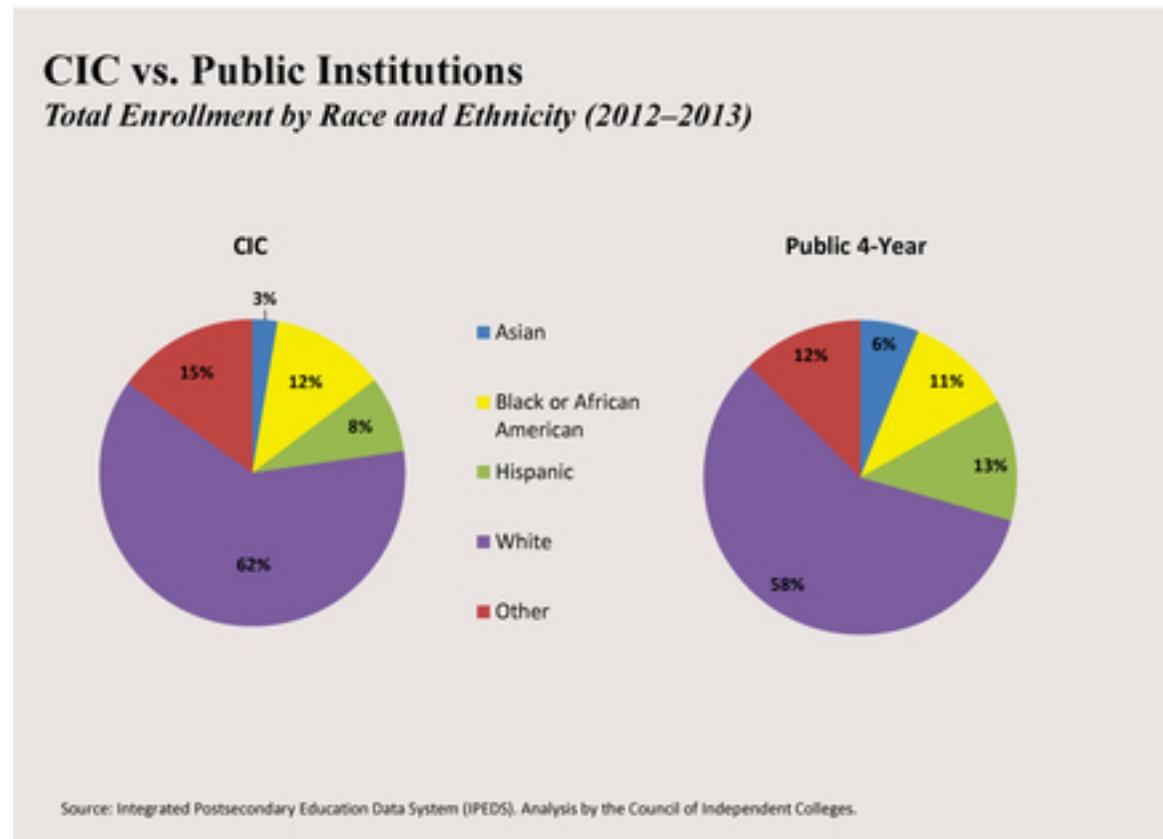
Did You Know?

Private liberal arts colleges are delivering on the promise of efficient, high-quality higher education for a racially and economically diverse student population.

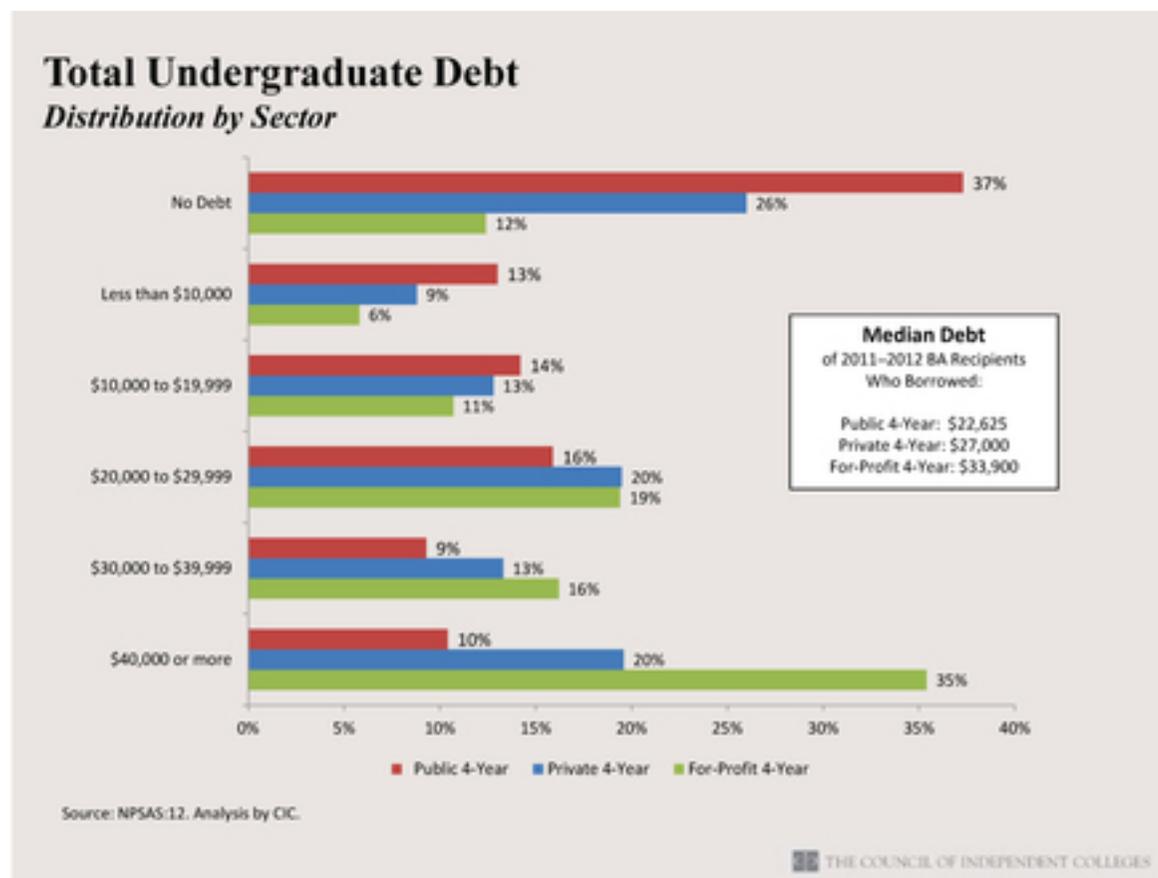
Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) (the national service organization for small and mid-sized, independent liberal arts colleges and universities to which nearly all Associated Colleges of Illinois member institutions belong)

reports that:

- CIC-member colleges and universities **enroll a diverse student population**, including at least 23 percent students of color (compared to 30% at public institutions).
- Colleges and universities like those of Associated Colleges of Illinois actually **enroll a higher percentage of students from families earning less than \$40,000 annually** than do public institutions, and...
- Distribution of **income levels among students at ACI colleges nearly parallels the economic profile of all U.S. college students.**
- Private institutions have **done a better job of controlling tuition increases** than public institutions, with tuition at public institutions has increased at a far greater rate than at private institutions.
- **A higher percentage of private college students receive financial aid** than at public institutions, and they are **more likely to receive institutional grants** (eg, scholarships from their college) than their peers at publics.



- In fact, **private colleges provide students nearly six times more institutional grant aid** than the amount of student aid provided by the federal government.
- More than **one-quarter of private college students graduate with no debt at all**, and...
- Of the 74% of private college students who *do* borrow, **the average debt is \$27,000**. By comparison, the average price of a new car in 2015 is \$33,560.
- Compared to peers at public institutions, **private college students are more likely to have written extensively for course assignments, to have participated in an internship, and to have discussed career plans with a faculty advisor.**
- Private colleges **post higher four-year graduation rates – for all students and for students of color.**



In the News

Liberal arts education can make people smarter, says Cecilia Gaposchkin. Writing for Huffington Post in July 2015, Gaposchkin, who is Dartmouth College's Assistant Dean of Pre-Major Advising and Associate Professor of Medieval History, acknowledges that a liberal arts education is not a career-driven, preprofessional major. Rather, she argues, liberal arts prepares students "for a multitude of careers." Liberal education done right, says Gaposchkin, "...undertaken with enthusiasm, curiosity, and passion, makes you smarter...it hones your natural skills of discernment and intellect to productive thought and the creative application of knowledge." These, she says, are "basic transferrable skills, to be used in any -- or many -- context(s). This is why, when employers hire students from liberal arts colleges, they care less about the student's major than about the student's ability to talk about their major."

[Read the full story](#)

Ignore those who state that the liberal arts are obsolete, writes University of Florida student Courtney Studdert, a member of the USA TODAY College contributor network. Studdert makes the case that "a liberal arts degree is equivalent to an engineering or finance degree in terms of granting you a skill set for success," and she presents four good reasons why she believes in the value of liberal arts education: 1) It gives you the ability to think critically. 2) Being well-read is more than just a talking point. 3) It develops rhetorical skills. 4) It fosters innovation.

[Read the full story](#)





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