

ACI's Fall Conference Draws More Than 150 People for Learning, Networking

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Dr. S. Georgia Nugent, interim president, Illinois Wesleyan University, spoke about the enduring value of the liberal arts.

Member college and university staff attending ACI's Fall Conference heard a strong case for broad-based liberal arts education and learned helpful skills and ideas in a series of professional development sessions. The conference focused on staff working in advancement, finance, marketing and public relations, and student engagement roles.

Held Nov. 1, in Lisle, Illinois, the conference drew 152 attendees from 24 of [ACI's 26 member colleges and universities](#). "We were pleased to host so many professionals from ACI member institutions," said Constance Willoughby, ACI director of conferences and scholarships. "This conference is focused on providing meaningful learning, tailored to staff working in independent, private liberal arts colleges and universities that make up our membership." A new round of professional development conferences is planned for June 2020.

In her opening remarks, [Dr. S. Georgia Nugent](#), interim president at [Illinois Wesleyan University](#), Bloomington, and senior fellow at the [Council of Independent Colleges \(CIC\)](#), Washington, D.C., pointed out that liberal arts education has endured for centuries and will endure into the future. Liberal arts, she said, means "gaining the skills to live life fully as a free individual." She pointed out that liberal arts has always included sciences, and Nugent cited a number of studies that debunk suggestions that English, philosophy or psychology majors, for example, are unemployable. In fact, she said, studies consistently show that over time, liberal arts majors do well and advance in their careers.

"Broad-based liberal arts learning seems to me more practical than ever, when we know that our graduates will not just change jobs, but change careers multiple times in their lives," Nugent said. "The marriage of rigorous liberal arts study with the possibility of professional training is the gold standard for future success."



More than 150 people attended the conference, which featured several professional development sessions.

Liberal arts institutions have demonstrated creativity and change, Nugent said, citing a CIC study of innovation she did involving 500 leaders from more than 100 institutions. Liberal arts institutions are reaching out to new students, including transfers, veterans, international students and adult learners. New programs are being initiated, such as in cybersecurity and data analytics. Plus, students are provided internships, externships, alumni mentors and experiential learning.

"We are changing our pedagogies, so that the 'learner' is more of a 'doer' – and therefore better prepared for today's and tomorrow's world," Nugent added.