



# Reporter

## April - May 2023

### In This Issue:

- From the Executive Director: April Arnold
- ACI Peer Mentor: Keishon Tinon, Millikin University
- 18 Students Awarded Scholarships Through ACI/FORVIS Micro-Internship Project by Parker Dewey
- ACI's Benefit Luncheon, 'The Future We Lead,' Celebrates Students in Higher Ed
- Board Considers Research Findings and ACI's Future, Approves Budget, Reelects Members
- Lewis University, St. Augustine College Plan Merger
- Dr. Susana Rivera-Mills Named 14th President of Aurora University
- Dr. Anita Thomas Named 11th President of North Central College
- Monmouth College President Clarence Wyatt To Retire at End of 2023-24 School Year
- Upcoming Events
- Your Gift is Life-Changing for a College Student in Need

## From the Executive Director

While many families can provide financial, practical and emotional support throughout college, this is not always the case for first-generation and low-to-moderate income students. These students need financial support, and guidance to navigate all aspects of college to graduate and obtain a job soon after. This is where ACI steps in.

In the past academic year, ACI provided just over \$585,000 in funds to member schools. These funds comprised a combination of scholarships funded by companies, foundations and individuals including the McGraw Foundation Student Emergency Assistance Fund.

More than 87 percent of our award recipients self-identify as low income. After Pell Grants, MAP grants, student loans and other tuition assistance, ACI funding helps them fill these gaps to continue their educations and proceed with their futures.

The retention rate for students participating in ACI's Peer Mentoring Program is as high as 97 percent at some schools. Sometimes, a student just needs guidance from someone who has lived what they have lived. Matching underserved first-year students with trained peer mentors from similar backgrounds who can guide them through the critical first year at college makes this program a success.

The post-pandemic environment has given many organizations the opportunity to review their programming and mission delivery. As a result of shifting dynamics in our economy and on our campuses, the future ACI leads must also shift to be responsive.

This time has given us the opportunity to do the same. We surveyed member schools, similar state councils and others to develop a deeper understanding about what is most important to take care of the students we serve. Economic challenges and social discord have only magnified an already complex learning environment for students.

The deepening of our collective investment in student success creates positive ripple effects for our member schools, our communities and our state. Partnering together creates impact that is felt from the stories we hear not only from the students, but also from our campus partners. It is possible to change one life at a time, and for that, we are truly grateful.

In gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "April".

April Arnold, CFRE  
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## ACI Scholars

### 18 Students Awarded Scholarships Through ACI/FORVIS Micro-Internship Project by Parker Dewey



# FORV/S

ACI distributed \$50,110 in scholarship funds to 18 eligible students participating this academic year in the [ACI/FORVIS Micro-Internship Project by Parker Dewey](#).

To be eligible for a scholarship, students from participating schools applied for at least four micro-internships or secured one micro-internship by Jan. 31, 2023. Scholarship recipients were selected by financial aid staff at participating campuses, said Daisy Gomez, ACI director, events and scholarships. Whether selected or not for a micro-internship, most students said they appreciated learning about the micro-internships through the project.

In recent years, ACI has worked with [Parker Dewey](#) to promote short-term micro-internships to member college students, who gain valuable work experience. To advance micro-internships, ACI was awarded \$20,000 to initiate the



ACI/FORVIS Micro-Internship Project through a First Opportunity Partners grant by the [Council of Independent Colleges](#), Washington, D.C., with support from the UPS Foundation.

ACI committed to raise an additional \$30,000 to fund the project, which was provided by [FORVIS, LLP](#), a professional services firm, offering comprehensive assurance, tax, advisory and wealth management services. Individual donors also provided funding, including Donald J. Campbell Jr., Robert DiMeco and Arch W. Shaw Foundation. Campbell and DiMeco are members of the ACI Board of Trustees.

Micro-internship project funds were distributed to 12 member schools, which assigned the funds to eligible students:

- Aurora University: Leslie Gomez, sophomore, psychology major
- Elmhurst University: Mateo Gomez Bedoya, freshman, secondary education and Spanish major
- Illinois Wesleyan University: Mishwa Bhavsar, senior, computer science major
- Illinois Wesleyan University: Rancel Hernandez, senior, computer science major
- Illinois Wesleyan University: Harsh Patel, sophomore, computer science major
- Knox College: Robert Wills, senior, studio art major
- Lewis University: Genesis Sosa, freshman, business administration major
- McKendree University: Caleb Raymond Fisher, senior, business management major
- North Park University: Jennifer Colunga, junior, nursing major
- Quincy University: Emily Klinner, sophomore , marketing major
- Quincy University: Mary Ruxlow, junior, education major
- Saint Xavier University: Victoria Dolbniak, junior, digital marketing and finance major
- Saint Xavier University: Gabrielle Escobedo, junior, biology major
- Saint Xavier University Danya Mohamed, senior, biochemistry major
- Trinity Christian College: Briana Lowe , senior, health communications major
- Trinity Christian College: Ricardo Emmanuel Monroy, junior, marketing major
- University of St. Francis: Jade A. Parrish, senior, psychology major
- Wheaton College: Chan Daniel Kang, junior, interdisciplinary studies, pre-med major

### Keishon Tinon Millikin University ACI Peer Mentoring Program

Keishon Tinon has a plan: He wants to open a sports-and-recovery center for athletes. To get there, the [Millikin University](#) sophomore is majoring in Sports and Recreation Management, with a minor in entrepreneurship – while serving as a mentor in ACI’s Peer Mentoring Program and playing as a defensive lineman on the university’s football team.

Tinon, Belleville, Illinois, says he did some research and chose Millikin for career reasons. "What really caught my eye is the job placement rate as soon as you graduate (of) 98 percent," he says. "It’s also a smaller school, so I just figured you could get more help here, which is true. I feel like I can have a great career once I leave Millikin."

So far at Millikin, Tinon has made many career-related connections, which led him to apply for positions that involve student mentoring, similar to his experience first as an ACI mentee and now, a mentor.

[Read more of Keishon's story.](#)



## ACI News



Visit the [Benefit Luncheon webpage](#) to see more event photos and video.

### ACI's Benefit Luncheon, 'The Future We Lead,' Celebrates Students in Higher Ed *April 21 event raises critical funding for scholarships and program support*

ACI welcomed 115 registered guests at its [Benefit Luncheon](#) April 21 at the University Club of Chicago. With the theme, "The Future We Lead," the luncheon program focused on students attending the ACI's [member colleges and universities](#) and their aspirations and needs. The Benefit Luncheon earned an estimated \$65,000 in net proceeds, including \$17,175 in extra-mile funds raised the day of the event, to help fund ACI scholarships and programs.





Keynote speaker Dr. Susy Best, president and CEO, Thrive Group International, LLC, earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from [Wheaton College](#) and Master of Business Administration from [North Park University](#), both ACI members. In her remarks, she recalled her college experiences and asked the audience to recall their own college years. She chose Wheaton College over a Florida college because it was a great fit, and because of the financial support it awarded her, which included funds from ACI, she said.



A first-generation student, Dr. Susy, left, says she and a group of friends involved in ACI supported each other. "We became a glue to each others' success, because collectively, we were all at the school because of the incredible financial, academic and mentoring support we were offered," she said. "We were all first generation with big dreams and vision, yet we faced many challenges outside of going to college."

She told the audience that she and her college friends attribute their success in college and in life "to be built upon the foundation of financial aid, college acculturation, emotional, social, career and life support that we received while in college and was afforded to us by ACI." She concluded by challenging audience members to invest their time, talent and treasure in future leaders attending ACI's member institutions, and consider doing even more.

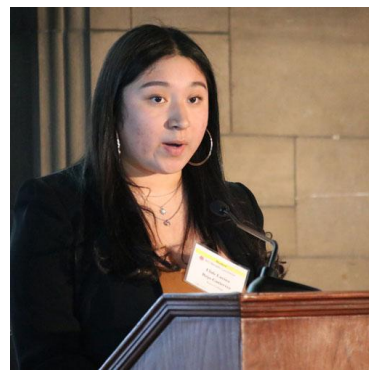
**Students say college successes made possible by ACI**

Cameron Steele, right, a chemical engineering major at [Olivet Nazarene University](#), benefited from multiple ACI scholarships in his college years.



"The ACI scholarships allowed me to focus more on school," he said. "It allowed me to dive into academics and spend time pursuing internships to get my career started. My career and the direction it is heading is something that may not have been possible without the help of ACI. It largely impacted my college experience and allowed me to grow as a student and an engineer."

Elide Lucina Rojo-Gutierrez, left, a biology and anthropology major at [Knox College](#), is thankful for the grant awarded her by the McGraw Foundation Student Emergency Assistance Fund.



"Sometime in the future I hope to be sitting where you are today, to take the weight off a student's shoulders and give them the peace of mind that I received," she said. "I want to tell future students, 'Echale ganas, tu puedes' (Keep going. You can do this). I want to express how thankful I am to ACI and the McGraw Foundation. My success is in part, thanks to you."

[Millikin University's](#) Kenyahn May, lower right, is a criminal justice and sociology major, and mentor in ACI's Peer Mentoring Program. He said he learned about the ACI program during his freshman year.

"That year was very emotional because of the death of my grandfather," he said. "The close relationship I had with my mentor and friends gave me a lot of emotional support that I needed. The program helped me when I needed it and has given me the opportunity to do the same for others."

**ACI to focus on changing needs for students and colleges**

In remarks to the luncheon attendees, April Arnold, lower left, ACI executive director, and Lyn Bulman, lower right, chair, ACI Board of Trustees, said ACI will adapt to fit changing needs of students and member colleges and universities.



"What brought you here today? Maybe it's because you understand the value of liberal arts education and want to see future generations thrive," Bulman said. "Or perhaps it's because you want to do what you can to ensure that all students -- but particularly those who are diverse, first generation, low-to-moderate income -- have an opportunity to obtain a college degree."



In the past year, ACI surveyed member schools, compared ACI to similar state councils, and others to understand the most important factors in meeting student needs, Arnold said. As a result, ACI is examining strategies, messaging and operations, while developing partnerships and adjusting programs as needed. "The deepening of our collective investment in student success creates positive ripple effects for our member schools, our communities and our state. 'The Future We Lead' is ambitious, it is hopeful, and it cannot be achieved without you," she added.

Rob Johnson, Rob Johnson Communications and ACI board member, was master of ceremonies. ACI Benefit Luncheon sponsors included Environmental Design International Inc., Fiducient Advisors, Gallagher, Hogan Marren Babbo & Rose, Ltd., Husch Blackwell, Jackson Lewis, Robbins Schwartz and TTX Co.

**Our Sponors -- Thank you!**



**Board Considers Research Findings and ACI's Future, Approves Budget, Reelects Members**

Participants at ACI's 2023 Annual Meeting focused on research findings and the organization's future, while also approving a budget for the fiscal year beginning June 1, plus reelecting and appointing board members and Executive Committee members. The meeting was led by Lyn Bulman, right, chair, [ACI Board of Trustees](#).

The board spent most of the meeting discussing findings from two research studies: A member survey, conducted by David Schreier and Associates, reported by board member Kimberly Marshall, FORVIS, LLP, and a benchmarking



survey of five state councils that, like ACI, are fundraising councils, reported by board member Leah Wallace, retired from Citi. The councils included the Iowa College Foundation, Michigan College Alliance, Missouri Colleges Fund, Inc., Ohio Foundation of Independent Colleges and Virginia Foundation for Independent Colleges. Board members also heard updates from each of its five committees.

The post-pandemic environment has given many organizations the opportunity to review their programming and delivery on mission. As a result of shifting dynamics in the economy and on members campuses, the future ACI leads must also shift to be responsive, said April Arnold, ACI executive director.

"We have many unique decisions to make, more questions to ask and more research to do. We're building a new bike while riding it," Arnold said, noting that member schools also face challenges.

As a result of ongoing discussions by board members and findings from the research studies – with more to be reported and considered – the board approved a \$1.2 million budget for the upcoming fiscal year. Budget considerations included aligning expenses with members assessments, focusing on programs most important to members and that yield funding, and learning from state councils, Arnold said.

The adopted budget includes realignments of staff and a plan to investigate ways to allocate expenses and funding for an annual fundraising event in a different way, with permission from existing corporate sponsors and contributors Arnold added. The organizational focus for the coming year will remain on scholarship support, mentoring opportunities and internship development.

**Board members reappointed**

Board members reappointed six members to new two-year terms. They are Elizabeth Cook, MiCat Group, LLC/CME Group board member; Robert J. Dow, Graystone Consulting; Nichole Johnson, Gallagher; Raymond E. Krouse, Jr., Sikich, LLP; Leslie J. Sawyer, Environmental Design International, Inc.; and Nicholas A. Simpson, Jackson Lewis, P.C.

Two presidents were named to the Executive Committee. President S. Georgia Nugent, Illinois Wesleyan University, was reappointed ACI president for the next two years. President David J. Livingston, Lewis University, was appointed to the Executive Committee as a member-at-large.

**Lewis University, St. Augustine College Plan Merger**

The presidents of [Lewis University](#) and [St. Augustine College](#) announced a plan to merge both institutions, with both boards of trustees unanimously approving the decision, according to an [April 25 news release from Lewis University](#).

Lewis University, Romeoville, is one of [24 ACI members](#). St. Augustine College, Chicago, is a former ACI member.



The schools will submit an application requesting the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) make St. Augustine College a part of Lewis University. The merger is centered on a shared mission to expand access and opportunity for students who are often underrepresented and underserved in traditional higher education, the release said.



"Our two institutions are well-matched in mission and values," said Dr. David Livingston, Lewis University president. "We fill a unique niche within higher education, serving students from all walks of life with affordable programs that deliver a liberal arts core and an emphasis on career and workforce preparation. Through this merger, we will build upon the legacy and tradition of St. Augustine College, offering

an expanded range of bilingual education programs, services and outreach to the growing Hispanic population in Chicago. No student today should face limited educational opportunity because of language. Especially not when the Hispanic community is the fastest growing population in Chicago." Livingston is also a member of ACI's Executive Committee.

The merger builds on the legacies of both institutions – each established to meet the needs of underserved communities – providing education as a life-changing pathway to expanded opportunity. Students are expected to be able to attend courses in bilingual format at urban or suburban locations.

"“We are excited for this once-in-lifetime opportunity. La única," said Dr. Reyes Gonzalez, St. Augustine College president. "Together, we will realize the dreams held by our founders; dreams of providing education to all, regardless of social class. Our combined strength will allow us to support more students with a life-changing educational experience that equips them for success in the marketplace. We will create a wider bridge to economic prosperity, one that is as expansive as the enterprising spirit of our students. This is the educational experience that will make us a leader for our entire region."

The merger is subject to the approval of the HLC, Illinois Board of Higher Education and the U.S. Department of Education. Both schools will continue operating as independent institutions with no disruption to students or missions until the merger is complete.

**Dr. Susana Rivera-Mills Named 14th President of Aurora University**

Dr. Susana Rivera-Mills, provost and executive vice president for academic affairs at Ball State University, has been named the 14th president of [Aurora University](#).

Rivera-Mills succeeds Dr. Rebecca L. Sherrick, who last summer announced her decision to conclude her tenure as AU’s 13th president after more than 22 years. Dr. Jeffrey King, executive vice president and chief operating officer, is also serving as acting president until Rivera-Mills begins her work June 1.

The university's board of trustees unanimously approved Rivera-Mills’ appointment after a six-month search conducted by a presidential search committee comprised of trustees, alumni, faculty, staff, and students, according to an [Aurora University news release](#). Rivera-Mills will be the first Latina to lead Aurora as president since the institution’s founding in 1893.

A native of El Salvador and first-generation college student, Rivera-Mills arrived in the U.S. at the age of 12 as her family fled civil war there. Like many immigrant students, she soon learned English and became the linguistic broker





for her family. It was a high school Spanish teacher who changed the trajectory of her life by saying to her in conversation — *when* you go to college, not *if* you go to college — a word choice that instilled in Rivera-Mills a belief that she could be anything she wanted to be.

"To say that I am thrilled only begins to express the emotions that I feel at having been selected to serve as Aurora University's 14th president," said Rivera-Mills. "It is incredibly humbling to have the confidence and trust of the board of trustees and the AU campus community. This is a special place and a special time for AU. President Sherrick has positioned the university for a bright future and her innovative leadership has created a firm foundation for us."

As provost at Ball State since July 2018, Rivera-Mills oversaw all aspects of the university’s academic mission. She played a crucial role in the development and implementation of the university’s strategic plan and in academic innovation. She supported first-generation college students, promoted faculty development and leadership, and guided the academic units through a new incentive-based budget model. She previously worked in various academic and leadership roles at Oregon State University and Northern Arizona University.

Rivera-Mills earned a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish and a Master of Arts in Spanish Linguistics from the University of Iowa. Her doctorate in romance languages is from the University of New Mexico.

Photo by Aurora University.

### Dr. Anita Thomas Named 11th President of North Central College

The [North Central College](#) Board of Trustees appointed Dr. Anita Thomas the 11th president of college, following a months-long national search that engaged trustees, students, alumni, faculty and staff. She will assume her official role at the college on July 1.



Since 2019, Thomas has served as the executive vice president and provost at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minnesota, one of the largest private women’s universities in the country. Thomas will succeed Dr. Troy D. Hammond, who announced his departure after serving 10 years as president. Dr. Donna M. Carroll was appointed interim president in July 2022.

A mission-driven leader, researcher, educator and psychologist, Dr. Thomas is a champion of liberal arts and sciences education, particularly as a foundation for inspiring curiosity and civic engagement among students, according to a [North Central College news release](#). Over a career spanning more than 25 years in higher education, she has deep experience in shaping strategic vision and supporting the development of student intellectual life.

A native of Louisville, Kentucky, Thomas is the first woman and the first person of color to lead North Central College in its 162-year history. In addition, she will hold the faculty rank of professor of psychology in North Central’s College of Arts and Sciences.

"Having the opportunity to become part of this extraordinary institution is truly a great joy and honor," Thomas said. "North Central is preparing our next generation of leaders and – in partnership with faculty, students, staff, the board, alumni and the Naperville community -- I am honored, humbled and ready to lead the college in the next phase of its storied history."

In her role as chief academic officer at St. Catherine University, she provided strategic leadership for the university’s academic programs. Among her achievements, she spearheaded implementation of the institution’s academic master plan, including the planned launch of the Office of Intercultural Engagement and Social Justice to increase cultural fluency and global awareness. In addition to academic affairs, Thomas has been responsible for student affairs and career development.

She previously worked in academic and leadership roles at the University of Indianapolis, Loyola University Chicago and Northeastern Illinois University.

Thomas earned a bachelor’s degree in education and social policy from Northwestern University and a master's degree in community counseling from Loyola University Chicago. She earned a doctorate in counseling psychology from Loyola.

Photo by North Central College.

### Monmouth College President Clarence Wyatt To Retire at End of 2023-24 School Year

[Monmouth College](#) President Clarence R. Wyatt announced he will retire at the end of the 2023-24 school year, upon completion of his 10th year as Monmouth's president, according to a [Monmouth College news release](#).

"It has been one of the greatest honors of my life to serve as this college's president," said Wyatt, who became Monmouth's 14th president in 2014. "My wife, Lobie, and I are grateful to the students, faculty, staff, trustees, alumni and friends of the college who have worked with us to make Monmouth a welcoming place of high opportunity and high achievement. We have hard work to do to ensure that Monmouth remains a force for good in the lives of students. In my final year of service I look forward to all of us doing this challenging and rewarding work together."

A national search for Wyatt's successor will begin this summer, according to Monmouth Board of Trustees Chair Mark Kopinski. The search will be chaired by Monmouth Board Vice Chair Ralph R. Velazquez Jr..



In 2017, Wyatt secured a \$20 million commitment, double the largest in the college's history. That commitment laid the groundwork for Light This Candle: The Campaign for Monmouth College. Launched in March 2019, the campaign had a \$75 million goal. When completed in December 2022, the Campaign had raised more than \$80 million, smashing its goal by more than \$5 million. Wyatt also shepherded Monmouth through the COVID-19 pandemic, enhanced campus facilities, and added new STEM majors at the college.

Photo by Monmouth College.

# Upcoming Events

- **Monday, May 29:** Memorial Day, ACI office closed
- **Wednesday, June 7:** Presidents Quarterly Conversation, 3:30 p.m., via Zoom
- **Friday, June 9:** Provosts Quarterly Conversation, 3:30 p.m., via Zoom
- **Monday, June 19:** Juneteenth, ACI office closed
- **Tuesday, July 4:** Independence Day, ACI office closed
- **Thursday, July 13:** ACI Board of Trustees, 4 p.m., via Zoom

## Give a Gift: Help a College Student Earn a Degree and Start a Successful Career

Your gift to ACI can help a deserving college student earn a degree and start a successful career. For many students we serve, your gift is life-changing.

Your gift provides financial support and helps fund programs for low-income and first-generation students attending ACI-member schools. Watch [video testimonies](#) from ACI scholarship recipients as they tell their stories and express their appreciation to ACI and our donors. Their positive stories illustrate the importance of your generosity.



Please join us today with [a gift](#), monthly or weekly. Every gift is appreciated in helping a student. Thank you for your support.

P.S. Inflation is a challenge for everyone right now, including college students. Will your company match your generous gift to double its impact?



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## ACI Member Colleges and Universities

Augustana College - Aurora University - Blackburn College - Dominican University - Elmhurst University  
Eureka College - Illinois College - Illinois Wesleyan University - Judson University - Knox College  
Lewis University - McKendree University - Millikin University - Monmouth College - North Central College  
North Park University - Olivet Nazarene University - Principia College - Quincy University - Rockford University  
Saint Xavier University - Trinity Christian College - University of St. Francis - Wheaton College

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