



Annual Report 2023-2024



Mission Statement

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.



THANK YOU!

On any given day in Illinois, thousands of students are working hard to earn their degrees and prepare for meaningful careers. At the heart of Associated Colleges of Illinois (ACI) is a simple truth: we bring together philanthropic and career partnerships to help make their path a little easier.

ACI exists to amplify the vital work of our member colleges and universities—each one distinct, each one deeply committed to student success. Many of these students are the first in their families to attend college or come from economically challenged backgrounds. While each has its own story, they are united by a shared belief in the power of education and the promise it holds for the future.

We began by listening. Through our spring member assessment and state council benchmarking, we gained valuable insight into evolving campus needs. We also welcomed new leadership at several member institutions, infusing ACI with renewed energy and fresh perspective.

To take this learning further, we convened a Strategic Working Group of corporate trustees and college presidents. Their task: to help chart a future defined by deeper alignment, thoughtful innovation, and broader impact. One message was clear—members and corporate partners alike want more ways to connect, collaborate, and build solutions together. We're aiming to answer that call.

We piloted a new student development initiative with Prolific Institute, supporting 20 students from four institutions. We explored new partnerships, including with BravenX. And, we made deliberate choices to do less, *better*, and to focus on what matters the most to serve students and the institutions that educate them.

Looking ahead, the strength of ACI continues to depend on all of us—our member schools and their leaders, corporate trustees, generous donors, partners, and our dedicated staff. Together, we are capable of so much more.

I'm proud to share that ACI closed fiscal year 2024 with a financial surplus, a meaningful achievement and a reflection of the disciplined, value-driven work behind the scenes. We renewed lapsed support, reimaged our annual benefit as a breakfast forum, and saw the profound impact of legacy giving from the late Don Campbell and the enduring generosity of former board chair Peter Willmott, who also passed away in late 2023. They will continue to change students' lives through their endowed scholarship support. Their legacies remind us just how much of a lasting difference one person can make.

Let that one person be you.

With gratitude and appreciation,

Executive Director

Associated Colleges of Illinois

ACI Breakfast Forum:

Advancing Inclusion and Impact

On April 11, 2024, ACI hosted its inaugural Breakfast Forum: Harnessing the Power of Inclusion at Saul Ewing's Chicago offices, bringing together regional leaders to discuss diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in education, workplaces, and boardrooms.



Left to Right: Shannon Fuller VP Talent, Health Care Service Corporation; Marquis Miller, VP of Economic Development, Obama Foundation (keynote speaker); Alexis Martinez, Aurora University.

“Moving from ‘Me to We,’ and from ‘Hope to Action’ allows us to inspire, empower and connect people to change their world.”

A special highlight of the event was hearing the inspiring story of ACI member student Alexis Martinez who spoke of persistence & purpose. Alexis, a socialwork and criminal justice double major, is driven by a passion for uplifting others. Her journey—shaped by diverse experiences in Chicago, studying abroad, fuels her dream of owning a juvenile detention center that empowers young people to reach their goals.

Despite financial struggles, Alexis persevered. “This scholarship helped me stay in school... My hard work was going to pay off.” Her story is a testament to resilience, education, and the power of believing in one’s potential.

Setting the stage for the event was a distinguished panel featuring Shannon Fuller (Health Care Service Corporation), Tyronne Stoudemire (Hyatt Corporation), and Liz Gross (Campus Sonar)—moderated by Toby Eveland (Saul Ewing)—that explored DEI strategies, the economic benefits of inclusion, and the evolving expectations of today’s workforce.

Keynote speaker Marquis Miller, Vice President of Economic Development at the Obama Foundation, provided an insightful discussion that connected inclusion to real-world outcomes in both education and economic development. As Miller stated, “Diversity, equity and inclusion, and belonging are not abstract topics; they are important lenses that when applied to economic development can help improve conditions for all people and businesses and make our economies stronger, more resilient, and more innovative.” Miller emphasized that inclusive strategies are not only morally imperative but also economically vital, urging attendees to take action in their own spheres of influence.

ACI 2023 Breakfast: **Harnessing the Power of Inclusion**

Partners

Environmental Design International, Inc.
Fiducient Advisors
J. Gallagher & Company
Hogan Marren Babbo & Rose, Ltd.
Husch Blackwell
Jackson Lewis
PNC Bank
Robbins Schwartz
William Blair & Company, L.L.C.

ACI Advocates

DeVry University
Virtual Care Group (Now Uwill)
Wintrust Bank

In-Kind

Quest Food Management Services, L.L.C.
Saul Ewing, L.L.P.

The Forum also featured roundtable discussions and networking opportunities that encouraged ongoing dialogue. Key themes that emerged from participant responses included:

- Expanding and strengthening the talent pipeline
- Bridging generational gaps in the workplace
- Creating psychological safety and promoting wellness
- Cultivating resilience and perseverance
- Harnessing the power of language and storytelling to drive impact.

With support from corporate sponsors and ACI Trustees, the Forum raised nearly \$65,000, plus an additional \$12,741 in donations, to support ACI programs.



Left to Right: Bob Dow, Graystone Consulting; Mina Rabideaux, Avanade, Inc.; Dr. James Applegate, Center for the Study of Education Policy (retired)

Created to replace a longtime annual ACI scholarship fundraiser, the Forum was funded by a First Opportunity Partners grant from the Council of Independent Colleges with support from the UPS Foundation. The Forum concept underscores ACI's commitment to building inclusive communities and expanding opportunities for underrepresented students through scholarship, emergency financial aid and other types of professional development support.



Left to Right: Lyn Bulman, Fellowes Brands (retired); Marquis Miller, VP of Economic Development, Obama Foundation (keynote speaker); Liz Gross, CEO, Campus Sonar; Shannon Fuller, VP of Talent, Health Care Service Corporation; Toby Eveland, Chicago Managing Partner, Saul Ewing; Alexis Martinez, Student Speaker, Aurora University; Tyrone Stoudemire, SVP of Global Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Hyatt Corporation; April Arnold, Associated Colleges of Illinois

ACI Launches New Website to Enhance Accessibility and Engagement

ACI proudly unveiled its newly redesigned website in Fall 2023, offering a more intuitive and accessible experience for visitors. The updated platform highlights ACI's member schools, student success stories, and key programs while showcasing its impact on education and workforce development. Visitors can explore the site at <https://acifund.org> and review updated member school and employment data.

Member School Data Summary

Student population: 33,062

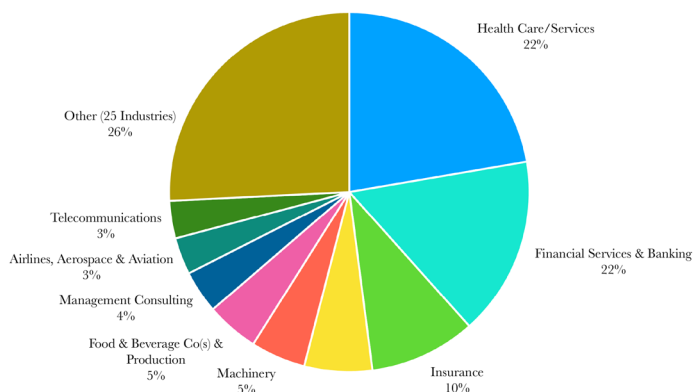
Financial impact on the state of Illinois: \$2.13 billion

Jobs provided: 22,081

Financial aid provided: \$833 million

The focus of this research is ACI alumni employed in Illinois. It does not reflect alumni currently employed in other states or countries.

Alumni to Industry Percentages



ACI's College-to-Career Programs reflect 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 first-time jobs.

Associated Colleges of Illinois continually seeks to address critical challenges that independent higher education can help solve through collaborations among its member colleges and universities, businesses, nonprofit partners, and public and private funders. ACI programs address two key national priorities:

1. Improve the outcomes of higher education by raising graduation rates among low-income and first-generation students;
2. Reduce college debt by improving the efficiency and effectiveness of higher education and by providing financial aid that makes independent higher education affordable to an increasingly diverse student population.

Peer Mentoring Program

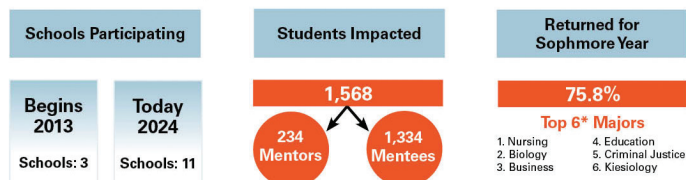
ACI's Peer Mentoring Program supports first-generation and low-to-moderate income freshmen at ACI member institutions by matching them with trained and supervised Peer Mentors who share similar high school backgrounds. These mentors, recruited from sophomores, juniors, and seniors who have overcome similar challenges, help at-risk students navigate their critical first year of college. By addressing financial and educational inequities, as well as the lack of family experience with higher education, the program promotes college persistence and degree completion among the students it serves.

By establishing a "relationship bridge" between mentees, mentors, the campus community, and its support services, ACI's Peer Mentoring Program acts as an early warning system. This approach helps to identify and address the specific challenges faced by these students before they can negatively impact a student's college experience. With input from the mentor coordinators and students, ACI has developed a mentoring guide app that will roll out in the next academic year to support its members.

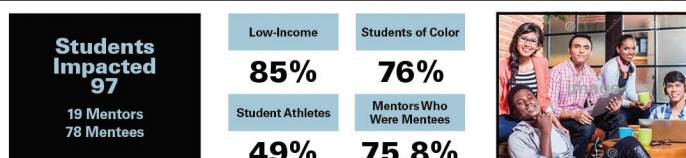
ACI Peer Mentoring Program



Since Program Inception



2024-2025 Academic Year



During the academic year 2023-24, the Peer Mentoring Program supported a total of 144 students, comprising 120 mentees and 24 mentors at 11 ACI-member institutions situated in urban, suburban, and rural areas across Illinois.

ACI PROLIFIC Fellowship Pilot:

Bridging Love of Sports with Careers

To enhance the support ACI offers to students at member schools, we recognized a key opportunity: a significant portion of our student body is made up of athletes.

The transition out of collegiate sports can be a difficult and often disorienting experience. For many student-athletes, it marks a major shift in daily routine, identity, and social structure. This period of change can lead to mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, and a loss of purpose. Additionally, the rigorous demands of athletic programs often leave little time for athletes to explore career options or build new skills, leaving them underprepared for the job market.

To address these challenges and help student-athletes navigate life after college, ACI partnered with the PROLIFIC Institute to launch a one-year pilot program focused on career readiness and personal development. Funded by Fiducient Advisors with \$29,000 in seed support, the initiative served 10 senior athletes from six ACI member schools, providing professional development, mentorship, and career guidance designed to support their transition into fulfilling post-college careers.

Through this partnership, ACI member schools will have the opportunity to provide a variety of resources and support for their student-athletes within one year of graduating. The program supports student-athletes through coaching, emotional and professional development, and community learning, while also providing access to opportunity upon graduation.



Through the ACI Prolific Fellowship, students gained access to invaluable resources and support throughout the process. Participants, like Hadam Dicko of Knox College, gained industry connections, soft skills, and career confidence, leading to internships and job opportunities.

Fellow Ayobami Arokoyo used his skills to advance to the final interviews for a prestigious internship with Becton Dickinson, a global leader in medical technologies and devices. Ayo shared, "To be honest, without their generous assistance and influence, I would not be here."

ACI Executive Director April Arnold and PROLIFIC's Nosa Eguae emphasized the program's impact, powered by Fiducient Advisors and the generosity of Robert and Terri DiMeo.

ACI is proud to support students as they take meaningful steps toward their careers, bridging the gap between education and workforce readiness.

ACI Micro-Internship Webinar with Parker Dewey

ACI continues to promote Micro-Internships to member schools and corporate partners. These short-term, paid projects connect motivated students and recent grads with professional opportunities. On November 15, we hosted a 30-minute webinar to explain how Micro-Internships work and the types of projects students can complete.

Representatives from Parker Dewey shared how these opportunities create equitable access to careers while helping businesses tackle important tasks.

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 associated with integrating new employees into their organizations.

Attendees learned how Micro-Internships provide on-demand project support and a valuable way to engage with students. The session included a live demo and walkthrough of the program's benefits. This event showcased a scalable way to support both organizations and the next generation professionals at 11 ACI-member institutions situated in urban, suburban, and rural areas across Illinois.

Online Offerings

As a statewide organization, we are leaning into the development of online forums to engage in discussions about workforce needs and career development, providing insight into industry expectations and emerging opportunities.

These conversations not only equip students and school staff with practical knowledge but also foster valuable relationships with employers who are eager to invest in the next generation of talent and the leaders who help guide students on campuses. At the same time, corporate partners benefit from early engagement with a diverse pool of motivated students who can become future employees, interns or industry leaders.

Webinars included:

- Hispanic Alliance for Career Enhancement (HACE) Virtual Career Fair – Sept. 29, 2023
- Student Success and Wellness Round Table – Dec. 5, 2023
- ACI Student Affairs Roundtable – Dec. 13, 2023
- Campus Sonar Hidden Voices: An Analysis of Student Conversations about DEIB in Higher Education - May 14, 2024

By building these connections, we aim to bridge the gap between education and career success, creating a mutually beneficial network that supports students, schools and employers.

SCHOLARSHIPS AND EMERGENCY FINANCIAL AID

Investing in scholarships and emergency financial aid for the Associated Colleges of Illinois is a crucial strategy for advancing ACI's mission to improve college graduation rates. ACI institutions already have higher-than-average graduation rates among low-to-moderate income and first-generation students. Generous financial aid significantly contributes to this success.

In 2023-2024, ACI awarded scholarships to member schools, assisting 218 students with a total of \$387,210. This funding came from corporations, foundations, and individual donors, with an average of \$1,749 in scholarship funding per student.

McGraw Foundation Student Emergency Assistance Fund

ACI scholarships and funds from the McGraw Foundation Student Emergency Assistance Fund are available to member colleges and universities throughout the academic year. Financial aid officers at these member institutions are responsible for administering the scholarships and emergency assistance funds to eligible students.

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.

Several students received crucial support, including McGraw Scholarship recipient, Michael Ford. He has distinguished himself both academically and through campus involvement. A dedicated member of McKendree University's co-ed cheer squad, Michael balances athletic teamwork with scholarly excellence.

For three consecutive years, he has been featured in the university's Academic Excellence Celebration, most recently presenting his capstone project on accounting theory, highlighting both his academic discipline and leadership potential.



Michael Ford

In the 2023-2024 academic year, ACI provided \$100,000 in McGraw Foundation Student Emergency Assistance, benefiting 60 students. The average assistance received per student was \$1,667. Since its inception in 1990, ACI's Scholarship Program has distributed over \$7 million in need-based scholarships.

Voices of Gratitude

Coming from a family who was unable to get a college education, it means a lot to us that I am the first person in the family to attend a college. It is easy telling people to work and go to school. But it is not easy attending school and having a job. During these years, I understood that more than ever.

Samantha, Aurora University

Your commitment to investing in the educational pursuits of students like me has made an indelible impact on my academic journey, and I am sincerely thankful for the opportunities your foundation has afforded me. Thank you for believing in the power of education and for being a beacon of hope for students like me.

Mishaun, North Park University

Organizations like you allow me to be who I want to be and end the cycle of suffering and poverty for my family. I'm eternally grateful to even have this opportunity.

Elijah, Monmouth College

ACI Leadership

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Fellowes Brands (retired)

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Gene C. Crume, Jr.,
Judson University

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Chicago Commons

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Leslie J. Sawyer,
Environmental Design International, Inc.

Leah Wallace,
Citi (retired)

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Gregory J. Meyer, Blackburn College

Glena Temple, Dominican University

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Saint Xavier University

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Arvid C. Johnson, University of St. Francis

Philip G. Ryken, Wheaton College

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April Arnold, Executive Director

DeRondal Bevly,
RubyRose Strategies, Consultant

John Brooks, Director, Communications

Daisy Gomez,
Director, Administration and Scholarships

Lauren Holhut,
Director, Foundation Relations and Grants

Barbara Jolliiff,
Staff Accountant and Special Projects

Tom Rubey, Chief Financial Officer

Leslie Scarpace, Program Consultant

Honor Roll of Donors

Associated Colleges of Illinois gratefully recognizes the commitment of individuals, foundations, corporations, and organizations that made contributions between June 1, 2023, and May 31, 2024. Thank you!

Ruben Abarca
Angela T. Allen
Ashley Allen
Anonymous (4)
James Applegate
April Arnold
Elise Awwad
Ellen Babbitt
BNSF Railway Foundation
Celeste N. Baker
Jane Beatty
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Arto Woodley

We make every effort to correctly list our donors. If we have made any errors or omissions, we sincerely apologize and ask that you contact Daisy Gomez at dgomez@acifund.org

ACI Corporate Partners



For additional information about ACI Corporate Partnerships, contact
April Arnold, executive director, 312-263-2391, ext. 1,

ACI Financials: June 1, 2023 to May 31, 2024

Financial information is presented for ACI's fiscal year ending May 31, 2024. ERAG Eiffel, Rambo Advisory Group Certified Public Accountants, issued ACI an unmodified opinion on the financial statements.

As of May 31, total assets were \$1,421,439, while liabilities were \$371,358. Total Net Assets were \$1,050,081. Gifts, awards, and other services totaling \$562,324 were distributed to members during the year.

Abbreviated Statement of Financial Position

Assets

Cash	\$481,217
Accounts Receivable	7,950
Investments	612,585
Property and equipment(net)	10,959
Other assets	308,728
Total assets	\$1,421,439

Liabilities

Scholarships and other distributions	\$248,210
Other liabilities	123,148
Net assets	1,050,081
Total liabilities and net assets	\$1,421,439

Abbreviated Statement of Activities

Support and revenue

Contributions	\$701,159
Member assessments	549,990
Corporate partnerships	41,414
Investment income (net)	15,148
Other income	219,779
Total support and revenue	\$1,527,490

Expenses

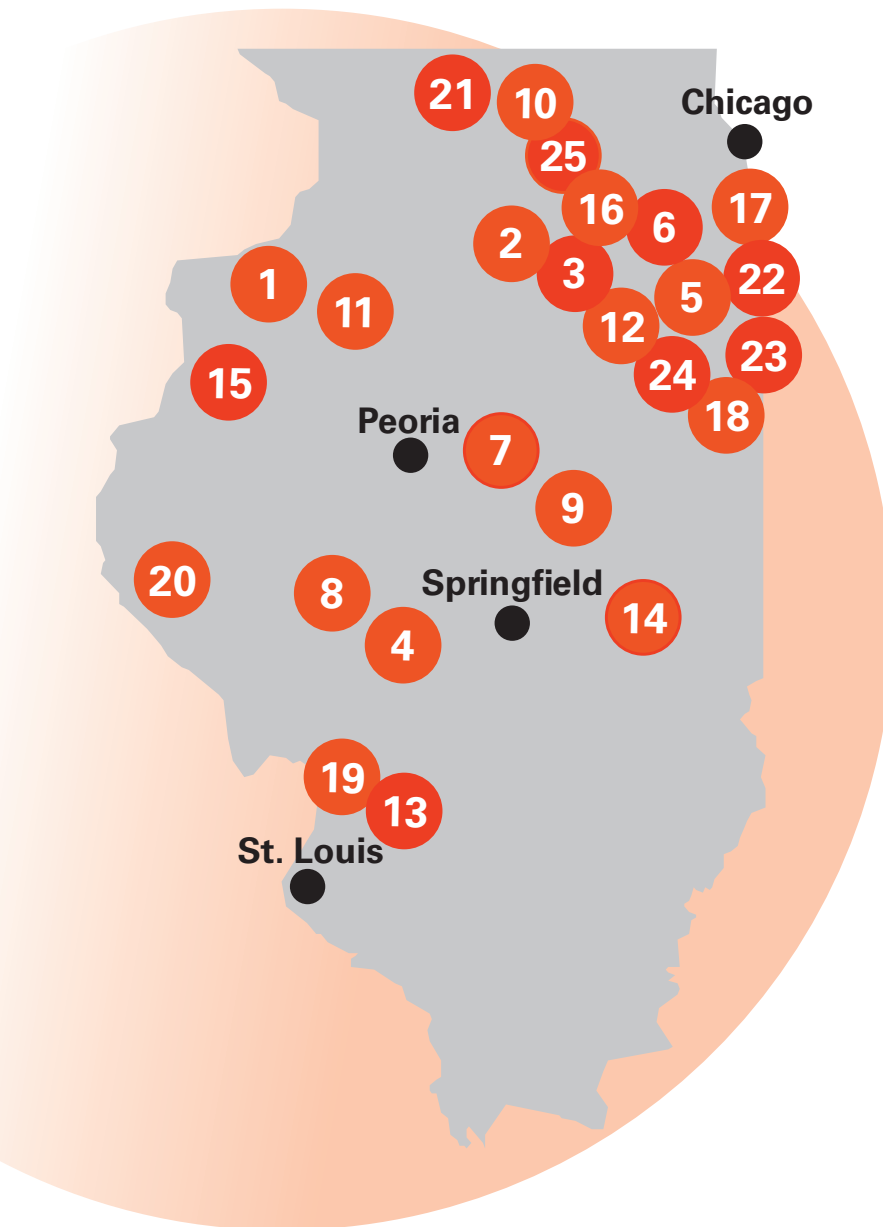
Gifts, awards and other services to members	\$562,324
Other programs	254,546
Management and general	199,116
Fundraising	216,636
Total expenses	\$1,232,622
Change in net assets	\$294,868

Receiving this Scholarship has been a turning point for me, allowing me to be more present and active on campus and to take part in enriching experiences like nursing clinicals and conferences that deepen my knowledge.

Josephine Chipp, Nursing/
Illinois Wesleyan University

ACI Member Schools Supported in the 2023-2024 Academic Year

For the 2023-2024 academic year, ACI proudly supported a diverse network of independent colleges and universities committed to providing quality education and opportunities for students across Illinois. We are honored to work alongside our member schools in advancing ACI's mission to expand access to higher education and strengthen the state's workforce.



1. Augustana College
2. Aurora University
3. Benedictine University
4. Blackburn College
5. Dominican University
6. Elmhurst University
7. Eureka College
8. Illinois College
9. Illinois Wesleyan University
10. Judson University
11. Knox College
12. Lewis University
13. McKendree University
14. Millikin University
15. Monmouth College
16. North Central College
17. North Park University
18. Olivet Nazarene University
19. Principia College
20. Quincy University
21. Rockford University
22. Saint Xavier University
23. Trinity Christian College
24. University of St. Francis
25. Wheaton College

Board of Trustees Members

Recently, ACI appointed three distinguished professionals to its Board of Trustees, bringing fresh perspectives and expertise to the organization.

As part of their introduction, we asked them what they believe makes ACI and its work special. Their responses highlighted ACI's commitment to expanding access to higher education, its impact on students through scholarships and career development, and its unique ability to connect students with corporate partners and mentors who help shape their professional futures.

These new board members bring a shared passion for supporting first-generation and underrepresented students, ensuring that ACI continues to fulfill its mission of empowering students and strengthening the workforce of tomorrow.



Dave Barnett

"I believe deeply that education is the means by which we unlock human potential, and that through unlocking human potential we can truly transform the world. Everyone should have access to quality higher education and the opportunity to realize their own personal value."

David Barnett,
DeVry University



Peter Fissinger

"Access to higher education for first-generation students is most important."

Peter Fissinger,
Fissinger Fundraising



Passion Johnson

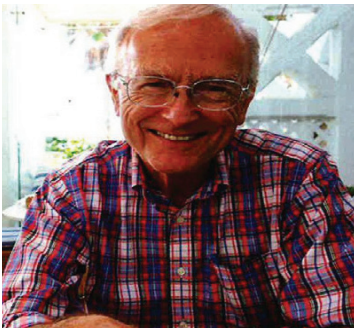
"ACI's mission is important to me because I fit the criteria of the students that ACI caters to. I was once a college student navigating the difficulties of everyday life, while also striving to be the best that I could be in my studies and at my university. I would like to be a part of the ACI's Mission to provide support for students who were once just like me!"

Passion Johnson,
Tawani Enterprises

IN MEMORIAM

Honoring the Legacy of Two Visionary Leaders: *Remembering Donald Campbell and Peter Willmott*

In Fall 2023, ACI mourned the passing of two remarkable leaders and former trustees, **Donald A. Campbell** and **Peter S. Willmott**. Both men dedicated their lives to expanding educational opportunity and left an enduring legacy across ACI's network of colleges and universities.



Don Campbell, a visionary in the fundraising field and founder of Campbell & Company, helped generate more than \$3 billion in philanthropic support during his career. He retired from active management of the firm in 2006 but remained deeply committed to the profession and to advancing educational access. His dedication to first-generation students continues through the **Donald A. Campbell Endowed Scholarship Fund**, supported by the Campbell Family Foundation.

Peter Willmott, a respected business and civic leader who served as ACI Board Chair, believed deeply in the power of education to transform lives. Together with his wife, Michele, he established a substantial endowment for ACI that created scholarships awarded annually through ACI member colleges and universities. These awards support students with financial need who also demonstrate outstanding leadership on campus. Through the **Michelle and Peter Willmott Fund for Minority Student Leadership**, his generosity continues to open doors for students across Illinois.



Their leadership, generosity, and unwavering belief in the potential of every student will be felt for generations to come. ACI is profoundly grateful for their service and investment in our mission—legacies that live on in scholarships awarded, lives changed, and futures made possible.



FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

As we close the chapter on a year of meaningful progress, I want to thank you—for believing in the mission of Associated Colleges of Illinois (ACI) and for helping us make headway with delivering on that commitment.

The year reminded us that when we listen to our stakeholders, we find opportunities to think differently about our work and new ways to adapt to change. Thanks to the commitment of our member schools, corporate trustees, partners, and staff, ACI is poised to reimagine its role.

We ended the year with a financial surplus thanks to renewed support from generous donors and have fresh momentum from new leadership across our campuses and our board. I'm delighted to welcome new corporate trustees, Dave Barnett, Peter Fissinger, and Passion Johnson, whose combined knowledge and skills in organizational and talent development, fundraising, and finance bring additional strengths to ACI's Board.

Looking ahead to my final two-year board term, I am excited about what's next. ACI will continue to connect students with much needed financial aid, and to build links between higher education and corporations to make a difference to young lives. New work includes collaborating with member campuses on how ACI needs to adapt to best support them through change and challenge, as well maximizing our contribution to enabling students to obtain high quality first jobs.

With your continued partnership, ACI will remain a key contributor to the vibrancy of our state through the economic contribution of our member institutions and the talented students they contribute to the workforce.

Thank you again for being an important part of our success.

Sincerely,

Lyn Bulman
Board Chair
Associated Colleges of Illinois



My confidence has grown. I carry myself differently and have set a higher standard for myself.

De' Havion Allen, Computer Science Major /Judson University



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