

Why College Matters

Workforce Strength. Economic Growth. Social Mobility.

A Stronger Illinois Workforce **Starts with College**



\$75 Billion in Annual
Economic Impact to Illinois¹



Hundreds of thousands in Jobs
Supported Statewide²

Independent Nonprofit Colleges Award:

- ✓ 42% of baccalaureate degrees
- ✓ 64% of master's degrees
- ✓ 67% of first professional degrees
- ✓ 50% of doctoral degrees in Illinois³

Independent, nonprofit colleges and universities in Illinois generate significant annual economic impact. They support hundreds of thousands of jobs statewide, while serving as critical partners in Illinois' workforce strategy to align talent development with employer demand and help more residents earn credentials that lead to family-sustaining careers.

Driving Talent, Skills, and **Career Readiness**

Today's economy demands adaptable thinkers and problem-solvers. Independent colleges deliver:

- **High-impact learning** like internships, research, and service-learning
- Strong outcomes in **critical thinking, communication, and leadership**
- Graduates prepared to contribute immediately to Illinois employers

A Proven Pathway to **Social Mobility**

For Illinois students, especially those who are first-generation or from low-income backgrounds, college is transformative.

- The wage premium for college graduates has grown from 39% more than those without degrees in 1980 to **75% more** today, translating to **\$1.2 million more in lifetime earnings** compared to those with a high school diploma.⁴
- College graduates experience lower unemployment and greater financial stability. Therefore, less impacted during downturns in the economy⁵

¹ NAICU [Shaping Lives And Anchoring Communities NAICU Report 2021](#)

² NAICU [Shaping Lives And Anchoring Communities NAICU Report 2021](#)

³ IBHE.org [Enrollments and Degrees](#)

⁴ CEW Georgetown | [The College Payoff](#)

⁵ Pew Research Center | [Is a College Degree Worth It in 2024?](#)

Invest in Students
Invest in Talent

Invest in Illinois



Independent nonprofit colleges and universities receive only about 8 percent of the annual Illinois higher education appropriations for operations and grants each year⁶. Higher education doesn't just change individual lives; it strengthens families and the fabric of every community served across Illinois. Together, we can ensure students, regardless of background, have the opportunity to earn a degree, build a meaningful career, and contribute to a stronger future for Illinois.

Your Financial Support Helps



Expand access for low-income and first-generation students



Provide scholarships and emergency aid that keep students on track to graduate.⁷



Strengthen college-to-career pathways across Illinois



Build a more equitable, skilled, and competitive workforce.

Because of you, another student gets one step closer to graduation. Thank you!

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.

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⁶ FIICU [Federation of Independent Illinois Colleges and Universities | Our Vision](#)

⁷ American Council on Education [Reasons-Students-Consider-Leaving-DLE-Survey.pdf](#)