

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Community Colleges Driving Force Behind Economic Gains for Students, Employers, and Local Communities

EAST PEORIA – Today, Dr. Karen Hunter Anderson, executive director of the Illinois Community Board (ICCB) joined Thomas Aguilar, a graduate of Illinois Central College and, Shelley Nguyen, Executive Director for Workforce Management and Employee Relations at OSF Healthcare System to draw attention to the impact of community colleges on increased earnings for workers and added skills to our workforce.

In discussing the economic impact of community colleges in west-central Illinois, the presidents of Illinois Central College, Heartland Community College, and Spoon River College highlighted earnings gains for students, a strong return on investment, and significant boost in tax revenues for local communities and the state.

Illinois Central College President Dr. John Erwin addressed the strong positive relationship between earnings and program completion for both ICC program completers and students within the state community college system as a whole.

The study showed the largest earnings increases for students occurred in the years immediately following program completion, with pre-enrollment to post-completion earnings gains from 2005 to 2011 averaging \$4,387 state wide. ICC program completers averaged gains of \$5,964 for the same period.

“The study confirms what we already know to be true of community colleges,” Erwin said. “We are encouraged that the Economic Impact Study sheds further light on the fact that a community college education is not only affordable and accessible, but is an attainable and valuable asset for our students and our community.”

Heartland Community College President Rob Widmer spoke about community college being an investment and the return on investment (ROI) for students in Illinois and at Heartland. The study found that for an Illinois student who earned an Associate of Applied Science degree or long-term certificate, their ROI exceeded 14 percent annually. When the same analysis was applied to the Heartland cohort, their ROI was 32.7 percent.

“Consideration of these numbers speaks to the value and quality of a community college education,” said Widmer. “Community colleges will continue to focus not only on providing accessible and affordable programs of study, but also supporting students in persisting to completion of their educational goals.”

Spoon River College President Curt Oldfield talked about the millions of dollars community colleges generate in taxes and the hundreds of jobs created as major employers and business entities. Oldfield also noted that community college graduates generate millions of dollars in local, state, and federal taxes.

“It’s nice to see Spoon River College’s economic impact on our local communities quantified at \$8 million dollars each fiscal year with 187 full-time positions,” said Oldfield.

During her remarks, Dr. Anderson noted that Illinois is home to 48 community colleges in 39 districts and has the third largest community college system in the nation serving nearly 1 million residents each year.

“Community colleges are vital partners for economic growth of local communities in the region,” said Dr. Anderson. “Investing in Illinois community colleges pays considerable dividends to Illinois’ students, employers, and local communities.”

The economic impact study was conducted by Northern Illinois University Center for Governmental Studies. The study is unique from many other state and national higher education economic impact analyses because student-level data was matched with employee-level wage data to determine student economic impacts through their employment and earnings gains.

For more information, including a copy of the statewide report, visit <http://www.iccb.org/eis.html>.

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