

## Applegate's Update

### Reclaiming a Pragmatic American Vision

Sometimes reading can be therapeutic. We are all currently suffering through very negative public rhetoric these days about the state of our country. It can be depressing and demotivating. For those who want to rise above that negativity I recommend Gregg Easterbrook's *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*. When I read that book I also was reminded of another wonderful motivating book I read a bit ago by Steven Johnson, *Future Perfect: The Case for Progress in a Networked Age*.

First of all I learned, again, that the repeated claims that our country is in steep decline are not supported by the facts. As Easterbrook documents among a long list of positives:

- Unemployment is below where it was in the "good ol' days" 1990s and job growth is strong;
- America's economy (no. 1 in the world) is larger than China's and Japan's (nos. 2 & 3) combined; and
- Pollution, crime, and most diseases have been declining for a long time while living standards, life expectancy, and education levels have been on the rise.

In short, in most areas that matter the United States and most of its states are "trending upward." That is important for people to know because much psychological research tells us there are few more powerful human motivators than evidence of progress: a belief that what we are doing is working. If we hope to keep improving we must stay the course on the good work that has been done, sometimes over decades.

Easterbrook catalogues that work in many areas including aviation safety.

That reference to aviation safety was what took me back to Johnson's *Future Perfect*. The book reminds us that U.S. history is replete with effective change movements made up of problem-focused optimists. Optimists who are unafraid to confront the brutal facts of the present but always believing there was a path to progress and a better life. As an old American Studies college major reading this, I remembered that about the only respectable school of philosophy this country has produced is-you guessed it-pragmatism. Thank you to George Herbert Mead, Robert Park, W.I. Thomas and others at the Chicago School.

Early in *Future Perfect* Johnson bemoans the misconceptions that undercut our progressive spirit. Not so much the negativity and hopelessness pandered by those hoping to benefit from people's discontent, but the belief in heroes and miracles. We fail to understand that civil rights progress was the result of thousands of people finding common cause over decades and did not spring full form when Martin Luther King had a dream. That income security for the elderly did not spring miraculously from the passage of Medicare by a heroic president.

Most recently Johnson notes our (and the media's) framing of the "Miracle on the Hudson." A heroic captain and crew apparently made a miracle happen when birds hit an airliner's engine over the Hudson River in New York as they landed safely in the river with no casualties. The facts, according to Johnson (and several aviation experts I consulted) are different. Long before this event thousands of experts in the

aeronautics industry came together over many years to make air travel safer. The brutal facts they confronted were very brutal indeed as they reviewed the causes of crash after crash on land and water. But they would not be deterred. They believed they could make things better. Out of their work came redesigns of engines, guidance systems and more. As a result we are in an unprecedented era of air safety.

So when those birds hit the plane engine over the Hudson the engine neither caught fire nor shattered. Even more important the guidance system did not go out, making it possible for the pilot to land the plane evenly on the water and avoid flipping end over end as the plane would have done if a wing had hit the water first.

This is to take nothing away from the captain and crew, or Martin Luther King or Lyndon Johnson for that matter. It is to worry that when we see things in terms of heroes and miracles we are more likely to, as a people, sit around and wait for a hero (or demagogue) and a miracle to make things better. That susceptibility is heightened when we feel hopeless, that nothing is working, and that the end is upon us.

So, it is time for a rediscovery of our pragmatic, can-do American spirit. As a country, as states, as communities, as individuals we must find motivation in the many areas where we are trending upward. We must imbue ourselves with hope. We must seek out those people and initiatives that have produced the progress Easterbrook documents and that have pointed to the path to progress. We must band together, knowing the work will be long and hard, requiring collaboration across our differences and sacrifice to produce the collective impact that it will take to address the problems we currently face (and yes we have many challenges before us).

I know this is possible. I have seen, over the last few years, regions and communities in Illinois and across the country come together in just this way to make their places better. They put political party, ideology, deficit-thinking, and pessimism on the shelf. They identify goals (short and long term), honestly measure their progress, and share the responsibility of implementing strategies that work. That is the pragmatic American spirit reclaimed: trending upward, building on real successes, motivated, and confident that, rather than in a quagmire, we can find the path to solutions and a better, fairer, and more humane society.

## 60 x 2025



## COLLEGE CHANGES EVERYTHING®

[Registration is now open](#) for the **2016 College Changes Everything Conference**,

Tinley Park Convention Center, Tinley Park, Illinois, July 21, 2016 • 8:00 am – 4:30 pm

Register now to attend the sixth annual **College Changes Everything (CCE)** conference – the state's premier college access and success event. This one day conference focuses on effective practices and showcases resources available to help with increasing college access and college completion for students in support of the state's 60 x 2025 goal.

**CCE 2016: Aligning Attainment with Employer Engagement and Economic Growth:** In 2015, the Illinois General Assembly created **Higher Education Commission on the Future of the Workforce**. The Commission, comprised of legislators, presidents of institutions, and representatives of business and industry, has over the last year focused its work on building on existing efforts to improve the link between educational programming and regional workforce needs. At the conference you'll hear from Commission members about their work during a morning session panel discussion – *College Access, Completion, and then Completion for What? Better Serving Students and the Regional Economy through Collaboration*. [You can learn more about the Commission here](#).

## Reducing Gaps for Underserved Students

Illinois is slightly below the national average in persistence and retention but has been closing the gap on the national average on both measures, according to a recent study by the **National Student Clearinghouse** (NSC). (In this report, retention is continued enrollment (or degree completion) within the same institution for the fall semesters of a student's first and second year. Persistence is continued enrollment (or degree completion) at any institution.)

The [NSC Snapshot Report](#) shows that Illinois' persistence rate increased by 3.5 percentage points from 2009 to 2014 (66.5% to 70.0%) and retention rate increased 3.2 percentage points (55.7% to 58.9%). Illinois is slightly below the national average in both persistence (-2.3 percentage points) and retention (-1.1 percentage points). At the same time, the national averages on both measures were fairly stagnant. The national persistence rate grew by only 0.3 percentage points (72.0% to 72.3%) while the national retention rate grew by 0.5 points (59.5% to 60.0%).

Three Illinois community colleges have been invited to be among 44 colleges to participate in an experimental program allowing high school students to apply for federal Pell grant money to pay for college courses. [The "dual enrollment" program](#) is designed to help students from lower-income backgrounds.

**Carl Sandburg College** provides seminars for students focused on study skills and transitioning from high school, financial assistance advising, academic advising, counseling, tutoring, and library services. The College has established articulation agreements with local university partners so that credits can transfer to four-year institutions. The College has also developed dual enrollment coursework for welding, automotive technology, and nursing.

**Illinois Central College** offers the Fast Start and Strong Start program, currently serving 1,740 students. The program offers college level general education and career and technical education courses to qualified high school students. It is designed to increase accessibility to college for all students, to allow students to earn college credit while still in high school, to learn the rigors of college work, and to shorten the time required to complete an undergraduate degree.

**Southwestern Illinois College** is offering Running Start, a full-time, on-campus dual enrollment program. In addition to student support services and counselors, Running Start students participate in a specialized workshop series on college preparation and selection, and have regular meetings with Running Start counselors.

## Increasing Affordability



**How will you pay for your child's college education?** The cost of college tuition increases every year, leaving many families wondering how they will be able to afford college. The **College Illinois! 529 Prepaid Tuition Plan** is designed to offer Illinois families an affordable way to pay for college by allowing parents and grandparents to lock in the future cost of college at today's plan rates. This year alone, over 10,000 students are attending college using College Illinois!

benefits. The value of the plan benefits can be used at private and out of state schools as well. College Illinois! funds are held separate from state funds in a trust fund in the custody of the Northern Trust Company, and by law can only be used to pay benefits and run the program. Visit [Collegellinois.org](http://Collegellinois.org) to learn more about how College Illinois! can help make college possible for your child or grandchild. **Hurry – general enrollment closes May 31. ENROLL TODAY!**

## People in the News



On May 23, the **Illinois Senate** confirmed **Tom Cross**, **Dr. Alice Marie Jacobs**, and **Max Coffey** as members of the **Illinois Board of Higher Education**. The Senate also confirmed Cross as **IBHE Board Chair**.

**Dr. Karen Hunter Anderson**, executive director of the **Illinois Community College Board**, has been elected as Vice Chair of Legislation for the **National Council of State Directors of Community Colleges**. As an affiliated council of the **American Association of Community Colleges**, the council provides a forum for the exchange of information about developments, trends, and problems in state systems of community colleges.



The **Illinois Eastern Community College** Board of Trustees has named **Dr. Ryan Gower** the new President of **Lincoln Trail College**. Dr. Gower is currently Associate Dean for Undergraduate Academic Affairs and the Director of the Illinois Academic Enrichment and Leadership Program at the College of Applied Health Services at the University of Illinois. He has been with the University of Illinois since July 1999 as Academic Advisor/Lecturer, Instructor, Coordinator of Internships, and Director of Undergraduate Studies. Dr. Gower is expected to begin the duties of President at Lincoln Trail College in early July.

The **Loyola University Chicago** Board of Trustees has elected **Jo Ann Rooney**, JD, LL.M., EdD, as the University's 24th president and its first lay leader. On August 1, 2016, Dr. Rooney will assume the role of president on August 1, 2016.

Dr. Rooney previously served as president of Spaulding University (Louisville, KY) and Mount Ida College (Newton, MA). She also served within the U.S. Department of Defense as Senior Advisor to the Under Secretary of Defense Comptroller, Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, and Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.



## Upcoming Events

**[Calling all Student Government leaders from Illinois Colleges and Universities.](#)** The IBHE Student Advisory Committee (IBHE-SAC) is meeting for its **[annual Election](#) Saturday, June 4, at Roosevelt University**, 430 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago. IBHE-SAC elects the two students Board members, an Executive Chair, and a Secretary to direct the activities of the IBHE-SAC during the 2016-17 academic year. Students planning to run for one of these positions should **[fill out this form](#)**. Students who wish to represent their college must present a **[voting representative form](#)** (signed by their institution's Student Body President or Trustee) at or before the meeting. **[RSVP here](#)** to attend the meeting.



## IBHE Student Art Exhibition

Jill Munger,  
McHenry County College



**The Conversation**

Andy Lechner,  
McHenry County College



**3 Little Quigs**

## Student Laureates

In each issue of *The Bulletin*, we will feature student laureates recognized by the Lincoln Academy of Illinois.

Monmouth College



**Drake Decker**  
Davenport, IA

*Major: Business and Economics*

National Louis University



**Jeanette Kyle**  
Chicago, IL

*Major: Criminal Justice*

North Central College



**Jack Ryan**  
Oswego, IL

*Majors: Mathematics and Theater  
Minor: Computer Science*

## In Case You Missed It

A few articles and updates worth the read:

[News-Gazette](#): Podcast, Dr. James Applegate, May 18, 2016.

[Northwest Herald](#): Woodstock veteran receives MCC award after overcoming homelessness to help others, May 20, 2016.

[State Journal-Register](#): Budget stalemate erodes interest in some Illinois colleges, May 22, 2016

[Chicago Defender](#): Nigeria and Chicago State make history together, May 25, 2016.

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