

Blackburn College Among 13 Colleges To Receive \$3.275 Million To Tackle Student Mental Health

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CARLINVILLE - To address what the [U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy](#) recognizes as [“the defining public health crisis of our time,”](#) thirteen colleges have received \$3.275 million in funding from The Endeavor Foundation for the first phase of “Enhancing Student Learning and Experience through Campus Wellness, Student Wellbeing, and Mental Health Initiatives.” The multi-year collaborative project seeks both to respond to pressing needs and to integrate attention to mental health, well-being, and wellness throughout student learning.

“Student mental health issues represent an urgent challenge. These issues affect students in ways that prevent them from full participation in campus life and rob them of the

precious sense of well-being which should be theirs. We hope that the Colleges' work will help them transform their communities as well as inspire other institutions of higher learning to address challenges collectively," said Julie Kidd, President of The Endeavor Foundation.

Blackburn College is one of thirteen colleges to receive resources to help address this significant problem.

"At Blackburn, we firmly believe in educating the whole student," said Dr. Gregory J Meyer, President of Blackburn College. "Our unique model, which seamlessly blends the richness of a liberal arts education with practical, real-world experience through our student-led Work Program, equips our students with the skills and resilience they need not only to thrive but to excel in a rapidly changing world. Our commitment to nurturing a student's holistic development extends beyond academic; it encompasses their physical, emotional, and overall wellbeing."

Meyer continued, "We are excited and honored to be part of a collaborative effort to address this pressing challenge, and grateful for the generous support of the Endeavor Foundation. This initiative is a pivotal stride towards uncovering innovative solutions that will not only transform the lives of our students but also shape the future of higher education as a whole."

In addition to Blackburn, twelve small liberal arts colleges are part of the consortium—including Antioch College in Yellow Springs, OH; Bennington College in Bennington, VT; College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, ME; Northland College in Ashland, WI; Prescott College in Prescott, AZ; Randolph College in Lynchburg, VA; St. John's College, Annapolis in Annapolis, MD; St. John's College, Santa Fe in Santa Fe, NM; Sterling College in Craftsbury Common, VT; Unity Environmental University in New Gloucester, ME; Warren Wilson College in Asheville, NC; and Wells College in Aurora, NY. They have been convened as a group by The Endeavor Foundation since 2016.

Ashley Kidd, Vice President and Director of Programs at Endeavor, said that the original idea in bringing the colleges together was "to work together to raise the visibility of smaller liberal arts colleges by drawing attention to the strength of their student-centered approaches and to the deep, transformative learning that takes place on their campuses." In recent years, Kidd said, the focus for the colleges in the group, dubbed the "Endeavor Lab Colleges," evolved into discussion about the many challenges facing higher education and small colleges even more acutely and the decision to take on one of them collectively and collaboratively.

"A strong future for higher education in the United States lies in collaboration, not competition," said Julie Kidd. "We are confident that we will see in this emerging project the benefits of collaboration as the ELCs work jointly to tackle the pressing problem of student mental health challenges. I salute their courage and dedication in doing so. Their courage is indeed a source of inspiration for our work at Endeavor."

Phase I, which will unfold over two years, focuses on immediate capacity building at each of the institutions and the development of shared pilot projects within four thematic areas, including credit-bearing curricular initiatives related to mental health and well-being; explorations of purposeful life and work, including defining personal values and what it means to live a meaningful life; place-based experiential learning in non-traditional classroom spaces; and expanded services and supports for mental health and well-being, including community care, clinical and non-clinical interventions and approaches, peer counseling, and restorative justice.

Each participating institution has received \$100,000 this year and will receive \$75,000 next year for this institutional capacity building. The ELCs will also develop and implement a process for continued and deepening collaboration. The successful completion of phase I will provide access to \$5.225 million over three additional years during which the schools will join forces to advance the most exciting and promising initiatives in one or more of the thematic areas. Together, they will develop programs and models that can be shared across the collaboration and to other liberal arts institutions.

"In this time when the value of higher education and of liberal arts education is regularly called into question, this project will show the power, relevance, and ingenuity of the liberal arts," said Isabel Roche, Executive Director for Special Programs in Higher Education at Endeavor. "The Colleges' shared commitment to attending to student and community needs around mental health, well-being, and wellness in expanded and new ways will allow for a fuller and more dynamic realization of the liberal arts ambition of educating the whole student, through greater integration, examination, and care for the other forms of self."

"Many colleges and universities are driven to prepare their students for a particular job or professional role," said Lori Collins-Hall, the grant Project Director and Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at Sterling College. "Given the mental health crisis we are witnessing among young people on our campuses, we are united in our aim to equip students with the curiosity, creativity, interpersonal communication skills, resilience, and capacity for critical thought and self-efficacy that are essential for successful careers, meaningful lives, and engaged citizenship in today's world."

About Blackburn College

Founded in 1837, Blackburn College is a four-year, Presbyterian-related, co-educational liberal arts college located in Carlinville, IL. One of only ten federally-recognized Work Colleges, Blackburn has the only program in the nation fully managed by students. Balancing academic rigor and experiential learning, each student at Blackburn gains tangible experience and develops critical skills by contributing to their community, all while building a resume and earning their degree. U.S. News & World Report has recognized Blackburn College as one of the best colleges in the Midwest region for 2024. Blackburn also earned a top-ten ranking for social mobility. Blackburn has been listed as a top performer for social mobility each year the list has been published. The Washington Monthly ranked Blackburn first in Illinois for performance by students receiving Pell Grants in 2022 and 2023. The publication has twice ranked Blackburn as the best baccalaureate college in Illinois.