

Gift Of \$1 Million Will Establish Endowed Dean Of Work Position At Blackburn College

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CARLINVILLE — Blackburn College has received a \$1 million gift from the estate of Marguerite Steffey Snyder. The College's Board of Trustees has designated the annual proceeds from this gift to directly benefit Blackburn's student-led Work Program and recently established the Marguerite Steffey Snyder Endowed Dean of Work position.

One of ten federally-recognized work colleges, Blackburn has the only work program in the nation fully managed by students. Combining academic rigor and experiential learning, each student at Blackburn gains tangible experience and develops critical skills by contributing to their campus and wider communities, all while building a resume and earning their degree. The Dean of Work position advises, coaches, and mentors the incredible students taking on the responsibility of managing the entire student workforce in daily campus operations.

Dr. Mark Biermann, president of Blackburn, stated, “We are deeply grateful to be the beneficiary of this generous gift from Mrs. Snyder’s estate. Our unique, student-led Work Program has been a significant part of the college for more than 100 years, helping to allow first-generation students and working-class families to access a high-quality education that can transform lives. This gift will strengthen the program now and in the future, ensure that more students can realize the same opportunities. Creating this endowed fund clearly indicates Blackburn’s long-term commitment to our singular Work Program.”

The first recipient of the inaugural Marguerite Steffey Snyder Dean of Work endowed position is Dr. Angie Morenz. A Blackburn alumna, Morenz began serving as Dean of Work in 2018. She stated, “A gift of this nature so powerfully and positively alters the nature of the community, much like the Work Program does. Nowhere else does leadership, work and the student experience exist like this. A college student can be in a class with a professor at 8 am and at 9 am they are talking through work-related issues as peers, colleagues. This personal dynamic doesn't exist anywhere else. This radical notion started in 1913, and while it does look different today, the Work Program has stayed true to the original intent of a means for students to get a private education. By the very definition of what happens on our campus, we are a community. And in many cases, we become family. I love seeing the absolute growth of students over their time in the program, as it can be such a transformative experience. I love seeing people step outside their comfort zone and step into leadership. Hard but good lessons are learned by doing so. I love that this is a purely unique experience that no other college can offer. I was given the chance to work as a student and as a professional with this program, and it has allowed me to pay it forward.”

Morenz continued, “The generosity of Marguerite Snyder will be felt for generations to come, just like the lessons learned in the Work Program. She saw the tremendous value the College and Work Program holds for students, while not having attended the College herself. She understood the deep connection of family, which is how she was connected to the institution. Fundamentally, her giving provides an example of leadership through philanthropy, and we are humbled that she chose us.”

Dr. Lauren Dodge, vice president for institutional advancement at Blackburn, said, “These funds will forever have a positive impact on Blackburn’s Work Program, and this isn’t the first time Blackburn has benefitted from Mrs. Snyder’s generosity. The college previously received a \$900,000 gift from her estate that helped build the beautiful atrium in the Mahan Laboratory Science Wing. We are very thankful for Mrs. Snyder’s thoughtfulness in continuing to include Blackburn as a part of her legacy.”

Snyder’s family includes her nephew, Steve Oberman ‘71, who shared a few details about his aunt’s life and why she chose to leave a legacy of support to Blackburn College. He explained, “My aunt Marguerite was not from this area and lived most of her life on the east coast, including Washington, DC and Frederick, MD. Through the years, she heard many Blackburn stories from my mother, including all about the Work Program and my time spent at the college. These stories included attending and graduating from Blackburn in 1971, and working as a member of the staff from 2000-2014 as the conference service director, the supervisor of the bookstore and in technology services as the help desk administrator/technician.”

He added, “Aunt Marguerite was an exceptionally good organizer. She was a very kind and generous person. She also attended business school and always valued work.” As a youth, Oberman reflected on how he had spent many summers working on his aunt’s 40-acre farm near Brunswick, Maryland where he picked and sorted peaches and helped with sales at the fruit stands. “My aunt would say all work was honorable. This gift, benefiting the Work Program at Blackburn, would go right along with her way of thinking.”

About Blackburn College

Founded in 1837, Blackburn College is a four-year, Presbyterian-related, co-educational liberal arts college located in Carlinville, IL. In their 2020 Best Colleges Rankings, U.S. News & World Report recognized Blackburn College as one of the top 10 best Liberal Arts Colleges in the Nation for Social Mobility. The Center for Education & the Workforce at Georgetown University ranked Blackburn as a top performer for Earnings-Price Return - 209% (#1 in IL, #10 in the U.S.) and Net Price (#1 in IL; #11 in the U.S.). The Washington Monthly twice ranked Blackburn as the best baccalaureate college in Illinois.