2020 TIAA Institute
Theodore M. Hesburgh Award for Leadership Excellence in Higher Education

Honoring
Shirley A. Reed
President, South Texas College
Joseph E. Aoun
President, Northeastern University
“The nation’s changing demographics, coupled with the power of technology and a sharpened focus on equity, underscore the exciting opportunities to shape higher education for future generations of students. Through their courage and vision, the presidents of South Texas College and Northeastern University are leading the way forward.”

Stephanie Bell-Rose  
Senior Managing Director, Corporate Strategy and Development, TIAA and Head of the TIAA Institute
Building new skills and a brighter future

Shirley Reed came to South Texas in 1994 with a commitment to start a community college in an impoverished region lacking access to higher education. As a community college graduate herself, she viewed education as the key to building a skilled, competitive workforce and giving people a better quality of life.

Today, her vision has been realized in the form of South Texas College (STC), formerly South Texas Community College, where she has served as president since the institution’s founding 25 years ago. Under President Reed, STC has become a nationally recognized community college with over 33,000 credit students each semester and a faculty and staff of more than 2,700. The college now spans five campuses, as well as a sixth virtual online campus, and offers more than 123 degree and certificate programs plus five baccalaureate degree programs.
Partnering with employers

Early in her tenure, President Reed saw the need to forge strong partnerships with business and industry, with a focus on creating a highly skilled talent pipeline for employers. These collaborations have attracted top-tier companies to the region and led to STC’s serving as lead entity for the North American Advanced Manufacturing Research and Education Initiative, generating an initial award of $5 million by the U.S. Department of Labor and $12.6 million in awards by the Texas Workforce Commission.

Transforming a community

Through President Reed’s foresight and leadership, STC has had an exceptional impact on the community it serves: a two-county, 96% Hispanic region along the U.S.-Mexico border with over 913,000 residents. Since STC’s founding, unemployment rates in the region have dropped to 6.2% from 24.1% in Hidalgo County, and to 9.8% from 40.3% in Starr County. This, in turn, has contributed to a 12 percentage point reduction in the number of Hidalgo families living below the poverty level and a 28 percentage point decrease for Starr families.

“I am humbled to be in the presence of Father Hesburgh. He would have been so proud of the achievement of South Texas College in transforming a region that suffered from a legacy of neglect and social injustice to a vibrant and critical economic leader for the future of the state of Texas and the entire nation.”

Shirley A. Reed
President, South Texas College
Education for the age of artificial intelligence

Northeastern University is renowned for its leadership in experiential education, lifelong learning and use-inspired research. Under President Aoun, these qualities have been on full display in the university’s bold steps to align education and research with the age of artificial intelligence (AI). Recognizing AI as our future’s seminal disruptive force, President Aoun authored *Robot-Proof: Higher Education in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*. This forward-thinking book provides a blueprint for Humanics, a type of curriculum that integrates human, data and technological literacies.

The integrated mindset created by a Humanics education is best instilled by experiential learning—not just co-ops and internships that contextualize classroom material, but also leadership experiences that foster innate human capabilities. To that end, President Aoun has amplified Northeastern’s signature co-op program, turning it into a holistic learning experience that touches every facet of a student’s education.
A global perspective

In a world made ever smaller by technology, President Aoun has infused Northeastern with a global perspective. He and his team have recruited new partners around the world—including companies, nonprofits, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and universities—to offer students a wide range of global co-ops and experiential opportunities. As of last year, Northeastern students have worked, conducted research and studied in 146 countries, up from 60 when President Aoun took office in 2006.

Exceptional outcomes

Through his bold vision and strategic planning, President Aoun has catapulted Northeastern into the upper echelons of higher education, professional learning and funded research. Ninety-three percent of its graduates are employed full time or in graduate school within nine months of graduation (a 10-year average), and 90% of employed 2018 graduates are doing work related to their major. In addition, graduate program enrollment is up by 1,800 students in the past year; applications to research doctoral programs have jumped by 80% over the past 10 years; and external research funding has more than tripled.

“Rev. Hesburgh was one of the great higher education leaders of the 20th century; it is deeply humbling to receive this award. He valued the uniquely human attributes that distinguish us from machines. This is critically important as our society faces the challenges, and opportunities, of the AI age.”

Joseph E. Aoun
President, Northeastern University
About the award

The Hesburgh Award is named in honor of the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., past president of the University of Notre Dame and longtime member of the TIAA and CREF Boards of Overseers. A world-renowned educator and humanitarian, Father Hesburgh (1917-2015) was a lifelong champion of human rights, the cause of peace and care for the poor. He received both the Congressional Gold Medal and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian honor.

As a tribute to Father Hesburgh’s lasting legacy, the TIAA Institute grants the Hesburgh Award to current college or university presidents or chancellors who embody Father Hesburgh’s commitment to higher education and the world at large. The award is presented each year at the annual meeting of the American Council on Education (ACE). Recipients are chosen by an independent panel of judges, and ACE administers the award on the Institute’s behalf.
About the TIAA Institute
Since 1998, the TIAA Institute has helped advance the ways individuals and institutions plan for financial security and organizational effectiveness. The Institute conducts in-depth research, provides access to a network of thought leaders, and enables those it serves to anticipate trends, plan future strategies and maximize opportunities for success. To learn more, visit www.tiaainstitute.org.

About TIAA
With an award-winning track record for consistent investment performance, TIAA (TIAA.org) is the leading provider of financial services in the academic, research, medical, cultural and government fields. TIAA has $1 trillion in assets under management (as of 12/31/2019) and offers a wide range of financial solutions, including investing, banking, advice and education, and retirement services.

About South Texas College
Founded in 1993, South Texas College offers more than 120 degree & certificate options, including associate degrees in a variety of liberal art, social science, business, math, science, technology, advanced manufacturing and allied health fields of study. South Texas College is the only community college in the state of Texas to offer five baccalaureate degrees.

About Northeastern University
Founded in 1898, Northeastern is a global research university and the recognized leader in experience-powered lifelong learning. Its world-renowned experiential approach empowers students, faculty, alumni and partners to create impact far beyond the confines of discipline, degree and campus. Through a growing global university system, the university expands opportunities for flexible, student-centered learning and collaborative, solutions-focused research.