

Homecoming: Redbirds in Flight Pep Rally Speakers



Larry Dietz serves as the 19th president of Illinois State University, a position he assumed on March 22, 2014. During his tenure the university has seen record enrollment, including increases in enrollment of students from underrepresented groups, while maintaining high academic quality. Illinois State University continues to be ranked among the top universities in the United States, recognized for its strong retention rate, top 10% graduation rate, and very low student loan default rate. The University has achieved record fundraising in recent years and initiated its second comprehensive campaign, *Redbirds Rising: The Campaign for Illinois State University*. Despite difficult economic times in Illinois, Illinois State University has remained strong and stable under President Dietz's leadership and is making plans to reach new heights in the future.

Dietz came to Illinois State University in June 2011 as vice president for Student Affairs and tenured associate professor in the Department of Educational Administration and Foundations. Previously, he served as vice chancellor for student affairs at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) for 10 years. Dietz also served as special assistant to the chancellor at SIUC and as a tenured associate professor in educational administration and higher education. Prior to his tenure there, he served as vice chancellor for student affairs and enrollment management, among other leadership positions, at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and in leadership positions at Iowa State University. Learn more about this speaker [here](#).



Kris Harding, M.S. '94, serves as the Executive Director of Alumni Engagement. A loyal alumna and long-time employee, Harding's career at Illinois State spans 20 years holding positions in University College, Office of Admissions, and the College of Education. Before joining Alumni

Engagement, she served on the leadership team in the College of Education managing outreach and communication for students, alumni, faculty, and staff. Harding earned her master's from the Department of Educational Administration and Foundations at Illinois State University and a bachelor's degree in psychology and sociology from Elmhurst College.



R.C. McBride '99 began his broadcast career at WDAN/WDNL in his hometown of Danville, Illinois, in 1990 while still a high school student. In 1997 he started at WJBC (replacing Charlie Schlenker, now WGLT's news director!) where he worked as reporter/anchor, play-by-play broadcaster, and talk show host. McBride won a national Edward R. Murrow Award for best radio newscast in 2002, the same year he moved into the WJBC program director's office. He served as PD until 2012, with the station winning two Marconi Awards as National Radio Station of the Year (in 2005 and 2009). He also won the Illinois Broadcasters Association's Silver Dome Award as the state's best medium-market play-by-play announcer in 2002. Learn more about this speaker [here](#).



Illinois State University President Larry Dietz announced the appointment of Kyle Brennan as the Redbirds' Director of Athletics on December 23, 2020. Brennan, who previously served as Utah's chief operating officer and deputy athletics director for internal operations, is Illinois State's 12th director of athletics in the NCAA Division I era. He has more than 16 years of combined university and athletic department experience at Northern Illinois, TCU, Ball State and Utah.

Brennan comes to Illinois State with a management background in the areas of compliance, facilities, equipment, events, finance, human resources and academic support. At Utah, he's also

directly supervised the football, men's basketball, men's and women's swimming and diving, golf and men's and women's tennis teams. Before becoming the COO in August of 2018, he also oversaw the external side of Utah athletics, including its partnership with Learfield IMG College. Learn more about this speaker [here](#).



When Brock Spack was named the 20th head coach in Illinois State football history prior to the 2009 season, he saw Illinois State football as a “sleeping giant” – a program that had all of the tools and resources to be a powerhouse in NCAA Football Championship Subdivision (FCS), but was lacking the foresight to see itself that way.

After five appearances in the FCS playoffs and back-to-back Missouri Valley Football Conference championships in 2014-15, it looks as if the giant has been awoken. A two-time finalist for the Eddie Robinson Award, Spack has changed the culture of Redbird football.

In 11 seasons at the helm of the program, Spack has posted an overall record of 84-50 (.627) and a mark of 53-35 (.602) in Missouri Valley Football Conference play. Much of that success has been aided by a fierce defense of home turf, as the Redbirds have amassed a 52-14 record at Hancock Stadium and a 35-8 mark since the stadium renovations were completed prior in 2013. Spack's teams have also picked up three wins over FBS programs, most recently on the road at Colorado State in 2018.

The 2019 season was a return to form for the Redbirds, who had missed out on the playoffs the previous two seasons. After a season-opening defeat at the hands of in-state FBS rival Northern Illinois, ISU went on to win six of its next seven games to jump out to a 6-2 mark despite fighting through several key injuries on the offensive side of the ball. A 2-2 mark down the stretch put the 'Birds in the FCS playoffs, where they dominated in a pair of road wins at Southeast Missouri and Central Arkansas before being narrowly defeated 9-3 in the quarterfinals against national champion North Dakota State. Learn more about this speaker [here](#).



Only 22 head coaches in NCAA Division I softball can claim to have won 1,000 games in their coaching career with at least 10 years of Division I head coaching experience. Only 12 of those coaches can claim 1,000 wins at one institution. Illinois State head coach Melinda Fischer '72, M.S. '75, who enters her 35th season at the helm of the Redbird softball program during the 2019-20 academic year, can claim both honors, in addition to many others.

The all-time winningest coach in Illinois State Athletics history. Missouri Valley Conference All-Centennial Head Softball Coach. A combined nine Missouri Valley Conference and Gateway Athletic Conference regular-season championships. A 2010 NFCA Hall of Fame inductee. A 2016 ISU College of Applied Science and Technology (CAST) Hall of Fame Inductee. All of that and more define Illinois State head softball coach Melinda Fischer.

Fischer's 1,092 career victories, spread out among 36 previous seasons as a collegiate head coach (at both Eastern Illinois [1979-80] and Illinois State [1986-present]), rank her as the 19th-winningest coach in NCAA Division I softball history and the 11th-winningest active head coach. She's continued her historical rise through the career coaching ranks with her 1,000th-career win in an 8-2 victory over Northern Iowa in the MVC Tournament on May 8, 2015. In April 15, 2017, Fischer became the 20th coach in NCAA Softball history to earn 1,000 wins at one school and only the 10th Division I coach reach this mark at the time. Learn more about this speaker [here](#).



Head coach Steve Holm is entering his third season with the Redbird baseball program. Through the 2020 season, his overall mark is 43-35, a winning percentage of .551. Holm is 14-7 in Missouri Valley play, a winning percentage of .667.

Holm and the Redbirds posted a 36-26 (14-7 MVC) record and earned a share of the Missouri Valley Conference regular season title in 2019, his debut season as head coach. The 36 wins was

a 14-win improvement than the year prior and the most wins for an Illinois State team since winning 39 in 2013. It was also the most wins for a first-year Redbird baseball head coach in program history.

The Birds earned an at-large NCAA Tournament berth in 2019 and were placed in the Louisville regional, defeating both Big Ten regular season champions Indiana and No. 7 Louisville, before ultimately falling to Louisville in the Illinois State's first-ever appearance in a regional final. Louisville advanced to the Final Four of the College World Series where they were defeated by eventual champions No. 1 Vanderbilt, who ISU had also beaten earlier in the year in Nashville.

Holm was named MVC Coach of the Year for the 2019 season. The Redbirds also collected the MVC Player of the Year (Joe Aeilts) and MVC Pitcher of the Year (Brent Headrick) awards.

At the conclusion of the 2019 season, five Redbirds heard their names called in the draft, including John Rave (Royals, 5th Round), Brent Headrick (Twins, 9th Round), Matt Walker (Tigers, 13th Round), Joe Aeilts (Rockies, 14th Round) and Jeff Lindgren (Marlins, 24th Round). Learn more about this speaker [here](#).