



CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY



Zaldwaynaka (“Z”) Scott, J.D. became the 12th permanent president of Chicago State University on July 1, 2018.

President Zaldwaynaka “Z” Scott has served as a transformative and visionary leader at Chicago State University, guiding the institution through a period of historic renewal and strategic growth. As the only four- U.S. Department of Education-designated Predominantly Black Institution (PBI) in Illinois, CSU has flourished under her leadership—embracing a bold new direction as a regional public university powerhouse.

President Scott has championed a forward-looking mission grounded in academic excellence, ethical leadership, and innovation. Her focus on equity and opportunity has positioned CSU as a national model in advancing economic mobility. Today, the University ranks in the top 4% of all colleges and universities nationwide for its impact on graduates’ economic advancement. Additionally, CSU earned its first-ever Carnegie Classification as a Research University, a milestone that affirms the institution’s growing commitment to research and educational access.

President Scott has led the development and implementation of two major university strategic plans, including CSU’s once-in-a-decade accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission in 2023. Her leadership has also delivered major infrastructure and equity investments, including securing funding for the multi-million dollar renovation and expansion of the on-campus Metra commuter rail station—enhancing student access and promoting transit equity in the surrounding community. She also launched the 95th Street Economic Development Plan, a bold, place-based strategy to attract investment to the corridor and position CSU as an anchor for inclusive neighborhood revitalization. Additionally, she reconstituted the Chicago State Foundation as a strategic fundraising and advisory partner to support long-term institutional growth.

A national voice for equity in higher education, President Scott co-founded the National Coalition of Predominantly Black Institutions of Higher Education, helping to launch the first-ever Congressional PBI Caucus. In Illinois, she convened and co-chaired the Equity Working Group, a cross-sector body focused on improving Black student access and success in higher education. The group’s recommendations have been cited in the Illinois Board of Higher Education’s strategic plan, A Thriving Illinois, and codified in the legislation that created the Illinois Commission on Equitable Public University Funding—underscoring her impact on shaping policy at the state and national levels.

President Scott currently serves on:

ComEd
Independent Director

Economic Club of Chicago
Board of Directors

Intersect Illinois
Board of Directors

The Institute for College Access and Success (TICAS)
Board Member

Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital Medical Center
Board of Directors

The Chicago Network
Board of Directors

Before leading Chicago State University, President Scott built a distinguished career at the highest levels of government and law. As an equity partner at national and global law firms, she advised major domestic and international companies on regulatory compliance, risk management, and crisis response—guiding organizations through complex legal and reputational challenges.

Earlier in her career, President Scott served 16 years as a federal criminal prosecutor in the Northern District of Illinois, ultimately rising to Chief of the General Crimes Section. In this role, she oversaw high-impact investigations and prosecutions, demonstrating a deep commitment to justice and public service. Her leadership continued with her historic appointment as Illinois’ first Executive Inspector General for the Agencies of the Governor and its Public Universities—a role

confirmed by the Illinois State Senate. There, she launched the state's first comprehensive statewide compliance and ethics program for government employees, setting a national precedent for integrity in public service.

President Scott has received numerous honors recognizing her trailblazing leadership and service. Notable accolades include the Lester H. McKeever, Jr. Individual Service Award from the Chicago Urban League, the Daniel J. Curtin, Jr. Lifetime Achievement and Anita P. Miller Advocacy Awards from the American Bar Association, and the Abner J. Mikva Award from the American Constitution Society. She has also been recognized by leading civic and professional organizations including the Chicago Bar Association, Chicago Women in Philanthropy, Northern Trust, and the National Coalition of 100 Black Women.

President Scott has been named one of Crain's Chicago Business' Most Powerful Women in Chicago Business (2018), a Notable Leader in Education (2023–2025), and a Notable Black Leader (2024). Her distinguished legal career has earned her national recognition in Chambers and Partners USA, Best Lawyers in America, Illinois Super Lawyers, and Leading Lawyers, among others.

President Scott earned her Juris Doctor from the Indiana University Maurer School of Law and holds a Bachelor of Science in Journalism from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In recognition of her exceptional career in public service and leadership, the Maurer School of Law honored her with its Distinguished Service Award in 2012 and inducted her into its Alumni Hall of Fame in 2019.