

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ACCESS AND DIVERSITY

Submitted for: Action.

Summary: The final report of the Committee on Access and Diversity, *Gateway to Success: Rethinking Access and Diversity for a New Century*, is included in these Board materials. In April 2001, the Board received the first draft of the Committee's report which was widely circulated among members of the Illinois higher education community and other interested persons. At that time, the Board directed the Committee to consult with representatives from Illinois colleges and universities, students, faculty, and other interested persons about the Committee's recommendations and consider revisions, if appropriate. The report, as revised, is presented for the Board's approval.

The final report is similar in major respects to the Committee's April 2001 draft. Numerous textual changes and three new or revised recommendations have been made as a result of the Committee's external consultations. The report also includes a new Executive Summary and other editorial changes, as well as information on events and court decisions that have occurred since April 2001.

Action Requested: That the Board of Higher Education accept the Committee's report and recommendations.

STATE OF ILLINOIS
BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ACCESS AND DIVERSITY

In February 1999, after a year-long dialogue among higher education institutions and outside constituencies, the Board of Higher Education approved an ambitious new statewide agenda entitled *The Illinois Commitment*. To begin implementation, in Spring 1999 the Board convened a committee to examine Goal #4 of *The Illinois Commitment* which reads: "Illinois will increase the number and diversity of citizens completing training and education programs."

The Committee on Access and Diversity conducted hearings, organized focus groups, and consulted with state and national experts. In January 2000, the Committee held five hearings throughout the state during which 90 individuals presented nearly 13 hours of oral testimony. Copies of written testimony are available from Board offices.

Following the hearings, the Committee formed three focus groups to consider the circumstances of financially needy students, students with disabilities, and minority students. The April 2000 Board item, *Committee on Access and Diversity: Update on Hearings and Focus Group Meetings*, describes these sessions. The Committee issued a draft of its report, *Gateway to Success: Rethinking Access and Diversity for a New Century*, in April 2001.

The Committee on Access and Diversity received written responses to its report from Illinois State University, Southern Illinois University, the University of Illinois, the Faculty Advisory Committee, the Illinois Latino Council on Higher Education, and from interested individuals. Since the April 2001 Board meeting, Committee members and staff have met with various persons and groups to discuss the report including the academic leadership of Illinois public colleges and universities, members of the Illinois General Assembly, the Illinois Committee on Black Concerns in Higher Education, the Illinois Latino Council on Higher Education, and persons representing the disabled community.

Comments and suggested revisions to the Committee's report are summarized in the June 2001 Board item, *Initial Reaction to the Report of the Committee on Access and Diversity*. In July 2001, Committee members and staff met with a group of interested persons to discuss the recommendations pertaining to students with disabilities. While the discussion in this session was wide ranging, considerable attention was given to the recommendation that the Board introduce legislation requiring textbook publishers to make available electronic copies of their published material. As described below, the final report includes a new recommendation to address this issue.

While most respondents have generally lauded the report, all have found something upon which to critically comment. Initial reaction suggests the most controversial part of the report is the recommendation that the Board introduce legislation that requires all high school students to complete a pre-collegiate curriculum.

The final report included in these Board materials differs in a number of respects from the Committee's April 2001 draft. Four types of changes have been made: editorial changes, the updating of information based on recent decisions and events, textual changes, and changes to recommendations. A summary of these modifications and additions follows.

One editorial change to the final report is the inclusion of a shorter Executive Summary. Language has also been added to indicate that the Board voted at its April 2001 meeting to conduct a study in the coming year of faculty representation in Illinois higher education. The final report also now includes substantial rewriting of the section on disabilities, including a new subsection entitled "Information."

Table 6 in the report includes new information about recent federal court decisions in Michigan and Washington on the use of race/ethnic criteria in admissions. Demographic information from the 2000 U.S. Census is also now included. Unfortunately, U.S. Census projections of future population levels in Illinois, including their race/ethnic distribution, were not available for the final report. The report also updates the section on diversity to indicate that a few recent studies have questioned the methodologies and findings of some previous research that demonstrated the educational benefits that accrue from race/ethnic diversity. On balance, however, the Committee has found that most research indicates that race/diversity in higher education stimulates learning and better prepares students for their post-graduate careers and lives.

The report has been strengthened in a number of ways as a result of the Committee's external discussions. Two examples are cited: the part of Chapter III supporting new efforts in the first year of college to reduce student attrition now indicates that this initiative should include activities to improve the effectiveness of the campus climate for underrepresented students. Also, the report now discusses the need for the training and development of community college counselors in order to effectively implement the recommendation that community colleges should have expanded responsibility for providing information about educational opportunities at all levels.

Three new or revised recommendations, that also arose from conversations with external constituencies, also appear in the final report. First, the report recommends the establishment of a committee, or working group, to examine the feasibility and costs of alternative ways of making published material available in a timely manner and at a reasonable cost to students with disabilities. This committee is to report to the Board on its findings by August 2002.

The Committee's previous draft had recommended that the Board introduce legislation that textbook publishers make available electronic copies of texts. This recommendation had been stimulated by action in a California law that requires publishers of textbooks doing business in California to make their published materials available, upon request, in electronic format. The ability to access material in this way allows for quick reproduction and places materials in the hands of students in a timely fashion. The California law, however, has encountered difficulties in implementation and access to materials continues to be a problem in that state. The Committee believes that the state of Illinois should learn from the California experience and take a broad look at the kinds of processes, services, and legal underpinnings that would facilitate the ability of students with disabilities to have access to instructional materials. As a result, a more broad-based approach to this issue is now recommended.

Second, a number of persons communicated concern that the Committee's recommendation on technology might obscure the fact that many disadvantaged students benefit

the most from personal instruction. A new recommendation has been added that would continue Illinois efforts to reduce the inequalities of access to computers and technology-based learning but would actively involve the Board and Illinois higher education in identifying the types of technology-based programs that make significant differences in the learning of disadvantaged students.

Third, the report now recommends that campus reviews of support programs that serve underrepresented groups shall assess, when appropriate, the effectiveness of these units in reducing student attrition during the first year of college. Campuses shall also report on best practices and effective programs that promote first-year retention in the Annual Report on Underrepresented Groups.

The staff recommends adoption of the following resolution:

The Board of Higher Education accepts the report of the Committee on Access and Diversity titled “Gateway to Success: Rethinking Access and Diversity for a New Century” and approves the policy goals and recommendations put forward in that report.

The recommendations in the Committee on Access and Diversity’s report are reproduced below.

Policy Goal #1: Expand the Scope of Policies and Mechanisms that Address Access Needs
Improving Pre-collegiate Preparation and School to College Transition

- The Board of Higher Education will introduce legislation that requires all high school students to take a college core curriculum.

The Board of Higher Education, the Illinois Community College Board, and the State Board of Education should work together to:

- Align high school curricula and graduation standards with higher education admissions requirements and learning expectations.
- Develop assessment and communication tools to inform students how well they are progressing in preparing for college.
- Create “college-like” courses for high school students that remedy academic deficiencies and model college level skills.
- Create an annual “Report on Readiness for College or Work” to inform the public about the academic skills of high school graduates and college freshmen. The report should provide indicators of college readiness of high school graduates, such as results from the Prairie State Examination and enrollment in pre-collegiate core courses, and indicators of academic achievement of students in their first year of college.

Expanding Commitments to Off-Campus Instruction

- In the development of technology-based instruction, public universities should place a high priority upon baccalaureate degree completion programs and programs that address the needs of diverse populations.
- The responsibilities of Illinois community colleges should be expanded to broaden access to computers and technology-based instruction and to provide information to local residents about educational opportunities at all degree levels.
- The Board of Higher Education shall undertake analysis and collect information about the types of technology-based programs for which there exists the greatest statewide and regional

need and to identify the types of technology-based programs that most effectively address the needs of disadvantaged students.

- The Illinois Century Network shall work with state agencies and Illinois colleges and universities to broaden access to computers and technology-based instruction.

Providing the Right Kind of Access

- The Board of Higher Education shall establish a Web-based Consumer Information System that promotes access as well as consumer protection. The system will provide information about institutional programs and services. It will help students with special needs, such as students with disabilities, adult students, students living in underserved areas, minority students, and off-campus students. The Board will establish a council to provide ongoing advice about the kind of information that should be included on the system.
- The Board of Higher Education and Illinois colleges and universities shall develop model programs that seek to reduce first-year attrition among types of students who have had lower rates of degree completion. Working with Illinois colleges and universities, the Board shall develop “principles of effectiveness” that describe practices that have proven effective in reducing first-year attrition among such student populations. The Board will use grant funds to develop these model projects and will disseminate these principles across the state via the Annual Report on Underrepresented Groups and the Consumer Information System. Campus reviews of support programs that serve underrepresented groups shall assess, when appropriate, the effectiveness of these units in reducing student attrition during the first year of college. Campuses shall report on their best practices and effective programs in promoting first-year retention in the Annual Report on Underrepresented Groups.

Extending the Reach of Student Financial Aid

- The eligibility requirements of the Illinois Incentive for Access program should be expanded to fund students in the first year of college who have minimal financial resources.
- Eligibility requirements of the Monetary Award Program should be expanded to students registered less than half time.

Policy Goal #2: More Fully Address the Access Needs of All Students

Students with Disabilities

- The Board of Higher Education will appoint a committee to examine the feasibility and cost of establishing new processes that would facilitate the ability of students with disabilities to have timely access to published materials and textbooks. The committee will report to the Board on its findings by August, 2002.
- Illinois colleges and universities should ensure that the technology-based courses that they offer are accessible to all students, including students with disabilities.
- The Board of Higher Education, working with Illinois colleges and universities, will convene a conference on how access and persistence of students with disabilities can be improved by new and emerging assistive technologies.
- The Board of Higher Education will incorporate information about students with disabilities into its Baccalaureate Follow-Up Survey.
- In conducting campus audits of physical barriers to accessibility, Illinois colleges and universities shall seek the involvement and advice of students and staff with disabilities.
- Illinois colleges and universities shall recruit staff and students with disabilities. Public colleges and universities shall periodically include in their annual reports on underrepresented groups information on these recruitment efforts, highlighting model programs and effective practices.

Students with Limited-English Proficiency

- The Illinois Board of Higher Education shall bring together educators from higher education institutions, secondary schools, and community-based organizations to consider how new technologies can best be used to strengthen the professional development of English as a Second Language and bilingual instructors.

Policy Goal #3: Evaluate and Demonstrate How Diversity Promotes Learning in Higher Education Programs

- Each public college and university should assess the efforts and success of its courses and programs to promote diversity and should incorporate such assessments into ongoing program review and academic planning processes. Such assessments should measure the benefits and learning outcomes that result from participation in diverse learning environments, as well as indicate how improvements in instructional and support programs might further enhance such benefits.
- Each public college and university should periodically report to the Board of Higher Education on the benefits and learning outcomes of efforts to provide diversity in their higher education programs. The Board of Higher Education, through its annual report on underrepresented groups, shall report to the Governor and General Assembly about these efforts, highlighting model programs and effective practices.

Policy Goal #4: Strengthen Statewide Efforts to Support Institutional Diversity

- The Board of Higher Education encourages public colleges and universities to use academic and personal factors in admissions decisions in addition to high school class rank and standardized test scores.
- The Board of Higher Education will work with Illinois colleges and universities to identify and develop mechanisms and procedures that can be used to support broader review of admissions criteria and closer scrutiny of individual applications. This Board and institutions will also identify costs that may be required to support changes in institutional admissions practices.
- The Board of Higher Education will introduce legislation requesting the establishment of a Diversity Grants program. The program will have a graduate component to promote diversity among minority students, students with disabilities, and female students in engineering, science, and computer science programs. A smaller undergraduate component will support underrepresented students enrolled in fields in which diversity is low on campus and in the work force. Both components will be based on applications that will document student characteristics and abilities, as well as demonstrate how the award would help improve diversity within a particular program at the student's home institution.

Policy Goal #5: Expand Outreach Efforts to Pre-collegiate Students to Promote Diversity

- The Board of Higher Education and Illinois colleges and universities will meet with private organizations that have successfully increased the academic achievement and college-going rates of disadvantaged students for the purpose of identifying how Illinois higher education might best partner with and support their programs and activities. A grant program should be established to facilitate such public/private partnerships.
- Illinois colleges and universities should make extensive efforts to recruit minority students by consulting a wide variety of sources that provide information about minority student achievement, such as test scores from the Prairie State Examination of the State Board of Education.

