

**THE ILLINOIS ARTICULATION INITIATIVE:
ANNUAL REPORT**

Submitted for: Information.

Summary: Although the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) began in January 1993, May 2001 marked the beginning of the fourth year of implementing the transferable General Education Core Curriculum (GECC) designed to ease transfer for students among Illinois colleges and universities. In addition to the adoption of the GECC, 26 major panels also have been implemented. This item reviews the current status of the IAI, highlights the past year's activities, and considerations for the future.

Action Requested: None.

STATE OF ILLINOIS
BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Executive Summary

May 2001 marked the beginning of the fourth year of implementing the transferable General Education Core Curriculum of the Illinois Articulation Initiative designed to ease transfer for students among Illinois colleges and universities. Since January 1993, faculty panels also have developed lists of appropriate courses to be taken by lower division students in preparation for transferring into the 26 most popular baccalaureate majors. This item reviews the current status of the IAI.

The Annual Report begins with a history of the development and implementation of the IAI. It also includes a brief summary of a November 2000 national study comparing state general education transfer projects.

The second section of the report discusses: findings reflecting the current status of the IAI project; observations about the impacts of IAI and the effectiveness of several broad goals and objectives; issues that have been raised in the past year and progress toward resolution of those concerns; the current efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of the various components of IAI using multiple measures; and a brief discussion about marketing the IAI.

The report concludes with a summary of highlights of this past year's activities and several considerations for future study, specifically addressing data needs, clarifying student learning outcomes, and enhancing student transferability through a statewide web-based transfer and articulation software package.

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Introduction

May 2001 marked the beginning of the fourth year of implementing the transferable General Education Core Curriculum of the Illinois Articulation Initiative that is designed to ease transfer for students among Illinois colleges and universities. Since January 1993, faculty panels also have developed lists of appropriate courses to be taken by lower division students in preparation for transferring into the 26 most popular baccalaureate majors. This item reviews the current status of the IAI.

History of the Illinois Articulation Initiative

In January 1993, the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), and the transfer coordinators of Illinois colleges and universities jointly launched the Illinois Articulation Initiative to ease the transfer of more than 30,000 students annually among Illinois public and independent, associate and bachelor's degree-granting institutions. The IAI grew out of the IBHE's 1990 undergraduate education policies on transfer and articulation. Two key concepts in these policies provided the underlying foundation for IAI: that "associate and baccalaureate degree-granting institutions are equal partners" in educating college freshmen and sophomores, and that "faculties should take primary responsibility for developing and maintaining program and course articulation."

Formally implemented statewide in summer 1998 (planning began in 1993), IAI is one of the most ambitious transfer projects in the country. To date, over 17,000 courses have been reviewed and approved through the combined efforts of over 900 faculty members serving on five general education panels and 26 major panels. (A 27th major panel—physics—will have its initial meeting this year.) Illinois has one of the most consistent, comprehensive course approval processes, assuring that all approved courses are comparable and meet the high standards established by the faculty panels.

The IAI developed in several phases. The primary purpose of Phase I was to make transfer easy and effective for students by developing a GECC that "would be acceptable in transfer at all Illinois institutions in lieu of each college or university's own campus-wide general education curriculum of comparable size."

- The GECC core curriculum is a limited array of lower division general education courses that serves as a statewide generic substitute for a participating institution's general education curriculum. The IAI is particularly beneficial for those students who are uncertain about what their major will be or to which baccalaureate institution they will transfer.

- The IAI statement of purpose indicates that the GECC does not replace the college or university's own general education curriculum. "It is assumed that while each degree-granting institution has developed its own general education program as part of its undergraduate degree requirements, most general education program objectives are similar from one institution to another."
- The IAI assumes that participating institutions will offer at least some of the courses in each of the categories identified by the IAI curriculum. Institutions submit individual courses for approval, not an entire package.
- The GECC is meant to transfer as a package. Individual courses may transfer at the discretion of the receiving institution.

Phase II of IAI expanded the project to create models for easing transfers into major programs and, to date, 26 major panels have been established to articulate courses that prepare students for work in specific majors.

Phase III instituted the process of regular five-year reviews to ensure that the panels' recommendations would continue to be relevant, i.e., that they would continue to reflect common practice in the first two years of coursework in a baccalaureate degree. In addition, panel members developed a plan and criteria for reviewing previously approved, institutionally matched courses, to ensure that they would continue to be comparable. In 1999-2000, the five general education panels (Communication, Mathematics, Humanities/Fine Arts, Social and Behavioral Sciences, and Physical and Life Science) undertook fifth-year reviews. In 2000-2001, major panels conducting fifth-year reviews included: Agriculture, Art/Art Education, Business, Criminal Justice, Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Engineering, Music, Psychology, Secondary Education, and Special Education. In 2001-2002, fifth-year reviews are scheduled for the following majors: Biological Sciences, Clinical Lab Sciences, Computer Science, Mass Communication, and Theatre Arts.

Illinois Articulation Initiative in the National Context

A recent study (November 2000), based on a survey of state level transfer programs by Barbara Townsend and Jan Ignash, found that the majority of statewide general education policies were initiated between 1985 and 1995—in large part to facilitate transfer between and among postsecondary institutions. Today, 34 of the 43 states responding to the survey reported that they have some type of statewide transfer articulation policies in place. The other nine states surveyed reported no statewide policies (Delaware, Maine, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin). In many of these states without statewide transfer programs, general education requirements were determined by the governing boards of systems and/or institutions.

In seven states, agreements included both public and private institutions (California, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, North Dakota, and Washington). All three states with the largest community college enrollments in the nation (California—20 percent, Florida—6 percent, and Illinois—6 percent) have created statewide transfer policies.

Twenty-two states called for general education requirements that proscribed either number of credits or distribution of credits, but did not speak to specific courses. Twenty-four states were more prescriptive in their general education requirements. States also reported

varying policies about the transferability of degrees. Six states limited transferability to the Associate in Arts (AA); only one state transferred Associate in Applied Science (AAS) degrees.

Thirteen states have adopted a model of “common course numbering” similar to Illinois’ IAI model. Common course numbering can mean several things: the same course is taught using the same books, same assignments, etc.; only a limited selection of courses may be taught (standardizing and greatly simplifying the entire general education curriculum); or as in the Illinois model, setting out course descriptions and then evaluating individual courses against that standard.

Most state-level transfer agreements articulate similar traditional general education objectives. Some states add on highly unique objectives: awareness of environmental issues, knowledge of state history, and development of computer technology skills. Implementation of objectives, and assessment of their outcomes, however, varies widely.

Current Findings

The Illinois Articulation Initiative has had the following results to date:

- It maintains one of the most extensive inventories of individually approved courses in the country (7,420 general education courses approved; 10,055 major courses approved).
- Participation in IAI is entirely voluntary, and there is broad “buy-in” by the state’s institutions. It includes participants from all sectors: private and public, two-year and four-year institutions. One hundred ten institutions and over 900 faculty members, transfer coordinators, and administrators have actively participated in IAI.
- The IAI brings faculty together across institutions to discuss general education and come to agreement on acceptable statewide standards.
- Through their activities on the various panels, faculty members have extended meaningful communication about curriculum with their colleagues statewide. As a result, institutions have conducted extensive review of their curricula, resulting in a variety of changes, including raised standards and more clarity in communicating course requirements to students.
- The most obvious outcome of the extensive network of faculty panel reviews of course syllabi has been statewide quality assurance. Every IAI course has been reviewed and approved by panels made up of faculty members from public and private, two- and four-year institutions. Faculty panels set standards for IAI courses, and students can be assured that standards in the courses listed are comparable across all participating institutions.
- The internal mechanisms for resolving differences have worked well. Panel members have worked hard to collaborate on seeking solutions. Curriculum-related concerns in particular have been discussed extensively, and for the most part, resolved. The following section of the report explores these issues in greater detail. The success of these internal processes for resolving differences is reflected in the fact that no complaints have been submitted through the established formal process.

- The majority of students graduating with AA and AS degrees from community colleges have completed the IAI courses, because the IAI has been adopted by public community colleges as their core general education curriculum.

Curriculum-related Concerns

As IAI moves from development and implementation into a maintenance phase, some concerns persist, most of which are curriculum-related. In general, the process of dialog and discussion among the participating institutions in the state has resulted in consensus, though not always unanimity. Several issues have been resolved, others are close to resolution, and discussions continue on some topics.

Advanced Placement (AP) Scores. A concern was raised by several institutions about differences in AP cut-off scores across the state. Advanced Placement tests are graded with scores of 3, 4, or 5. Acceptable scores vary from one institution to another, and from one AP test to another, even at the same institution. It is difficult, if not impossible, to find consensus on some of these course level standards. Common practice in higher education has been to recognize institutional prerogative. The Steering Panel recommended that all references to AP scores be removed.

Requiring Grade of C or Better in Writing Courses. This issue is similar to the AP score issue. All participating institutions have adopted this policy for IAI course transferability, but many participating institutions have different standards for non-IAI credit. For example, a student may earn a “D” grade, but the course would not be acceptable with that grade for IAI credit or transfer to another institution as IAI equivalent. Despite differences across the state on institution-specific standards, at a recent meeting of the transfer coordinators in the state, it was reported that many institutions are moving to adopt this policy for their own general education programs. The policy continues to be that for the writing sequence to count for IAI transfer, the student must pass the sequence with a grade of “C” or better.

College Algebra. The issues surrounding the teaching of college algebra is perhaps the most contentious. The IAI general education math panel has determined that college algebra is not a college-level course, and, therefore, is not acceptable as a transferable IAI course. The panel believes that college algebra does not teach quantitative literacy but rather focuses on skill development. Some institutions continue to offer college algebra and award general education credit for it, but only in addition to another IAI-approved mathematics course. Only one public university offers the option of college algebra as the only way to fulfill its own general education mathematics requirement, and they are currently in the process of reviewing this practice.

Foreign Language. The foreign language panel has determined that the first three semesters of foreign language courses are skills courses, and not acceptable toward meeting the general education fine arts/humanities requirement. The panel determined that the first three semesters of a language focused more on acquiring skills, rather than studying the literature and cultural expressions in the language. This decision reflects national common practice, but it represents a change from past practice in Illinois. The foreign language requirement is generally linked to the Bachelor of Arts.

Continuing Topics. There are two issues currently being explored by subcommittees of the Steering Panel. The first issue centers on whether or not the current GECC meets the needs of Associate of Science degree-seeking students. Requests to redesign the GECC from both the Chemistry and the Agriculture panels were rejected by the Steering Panel, but a subcommittee

continues to explore the issue. The second issue centers on how institutions should handle the transfer courses that have not been approved by the panels such as credits from out-of-state or non-IAI participating institutions. Again, a subcommittee continues to explore the issue.

Despite these concerns raised about IAI, the project also suffers paradoxically from its successes. Because it appears to be working well, institutions bring other transfer issues forward, assuming that they will—or should—be solved by the IAI network. While IAI cannot resolve many of these transfer issues, it does provide an important forum for reviewing transfer problems in general. One such issue currently being discussed is how to handle transfer credits from out-of-state institutions, non-participating Illinois institutions, and even out-of-country institutions.

Evaluating IAI: Multiple Measures of Effectiveness

The IAI was formally implemented in 1998, and students served by the IAI curricula are just beginning to transfer to universities in large numbers. Preliminary data are just beginning to be collected and analyzed. A variety of studies are underway, some solicited by the Board, and others undertaken by individual institutions. As more data become available, the findings can be integrated with more general transfer data.

At a macro level, we do know the following about the number of students who are likely to transfer in Illinois and therefore to be affected by IAI (Fall 1999 data):

- Community colleges enrolled a total of 339,673 students (Fall 1999 only); 136,760 (40.3 percent) of these students were enrolled in baccalaureate transfer programs, of which 79,782 were freshmen.
- The fall 1999 “snapshot” of community college enrollments identified 12,360 students as transfer students from other community colleges and four-year institutions.
- Traditionally, transfer students are thought of as transferring only from two to four-year institutions. In recent years, however, student transfer patterns have been marked by a new fluidity—students move between four-year institutions, and from four-year institutions to community colleges, and often take coursework at multiple institutions. Unfortunately, because we can’t track individual student migration across institutions to study their academic decision-making, it is difficult to evaluate the nature of their attendance—whether they are seeking a course or two, a certificate, or a degree. Community colleges have been studying these trends for some time, and they continue to explore this phenomenon. In 1999, for example, community college data reflected that of a total yearly enrollment (not just fall semester) of 650,605: 25,680 students indicated that they had previously completed a baccalaureate degree; 7,918 had completed a master’s degree; and 1,064 had completed a doctorate.
- In 1999, 13,848 students were awarded associate transfer degrees: 7,827 AA degrees and 4,498 AS degrees.

Precise information on student transfers is impossible to gather without a statewide student unit record system. While a student data system exists, it does not include the data necessary for individual student identification across systems, which would allow for in-depth analysis of academic decisions and transfer effectiveness. In addition, until recently, private universities have not participated in the shared record system. Thus, we do not know for certain how many baccalaureate degree-seeking students transferred to universities.

Institutional Studies/Observations

In an effort to get a preliminary look at the impact of IAI, public community colleges and universities were contacted several months ago to determine whether they had conducted any studies to assess their experiences with IAI.

General Education Core Curriculum. The General Education Core Curriculum was implemented in fall semester 1998. Large numbers of students who have completed the GECC are just now beginning to enter baccalaureate institutions.

- Illinois State University noted: “The majority of transfer students who entered higher education in 1998 or later and transferred to Illinois State are following the General Education Core Curriculum.”
- Southern Illinois University-Carbondale (SIUC) noted that they “articulate all courses that are in the IAI Core Curriculum into our own core curriculum regardless of whether the student completes the IAI core.” Full information about IAI is available on the SIUC website.
- Western Illinois University (WIU) noted: “Students are quick to tell providers when something dissatisfies them. Thus, silence is a measure of operational effectiveness. At WIU, IAI complaints are hard to find.” Information about IAI is included on the WIU website. Western Illinois University also identified a need for measuring student-learning outcomes beyond the course level.

Major panels. Moraine Valley Community College researchers studied the transferability of teacher education major courses. Their findings suggest that in general, courses in the education major transfer well: “Fifty-two percent indicated that the community college courses transferred with ‘few or no problems’; 12 percent reported ‘some problems;’ and 30 percent said they ‘didn’t know’ or it was ‘too soon to tell.’” While some problems remain, there were only eight reports of situations in the state (six percent) where courses were “sometimes accepted, but there are many problems.” Four of these reports were identified by the same institution.

Statewide Evaluation of the IAI

The University of Illinois at Chicago, in cooperation with eight two-year and four-year institutions, was awarded a Higher Education Cooperation Agreement (HECA) grant in 1999 to undertake a longitudinal study of the effectiveness of IAI. An experimental design was set up to compare the length of time to degree required by “native” students and community college transfer students. Each year, transcripts of 400 students from these eight institutions will be studied to see whether completing the IAI makes transfer easier and more efficient. In addition, the evaluation team will undertake extensive interviews with students about their transfer experience.

In the coming year, Northern Illinois University and College of DuPage will undertake a study of the transfer practices of students moving between institutions.

Evaluation of the iTransfer Website

In 2000, the website staff undertook a five-year review of their services and effectiveness that included a survey of faculty, transfer coordinators, and chief academic officers from

participating institutions. This survey was instrumental in their effort to judge the effectiveness of the iTransfer website through a portion of the population served.

Of 291 respondents to the survey, 79 said they use the website at least once a week, 19 use it everyday, 14 use it more than once a day, 86 use it about once a month, 52 use it once a term, and 15 say they have never used the website. The table below illustrates how respondents rate the iTransfer website. In general, faculty, transfer coordinators, and chief academic officers were pleased with the website.

The <u>iTransfer</u> website is...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Helpful to me in my work	3	4	52	108	84
User friendly	5	13	48	139	48
Accurate in presenting transfer information	1	8	36	146	62
Clear and straightforward	2	12	44	146	49

Transfer coordinators were surveyed on the question, “Does your institution treat transfer students the same as native students in the following areas?” A significant majority (greater than 90 percent in most areas) of institutions reported that students were treated the same, with a notable exception: “D” grades were not treated the same at some four-year institutions.

Participation in IAI is highest among public institutions, and highest in the General Education Core Curriculum. A total of 7,420 GECC courses and 10,055 major courses were included in the IAI website database on July 30, 2001, for a total of 17,475. Forty-eight public two-year institutions participate in the IAI GECC. Together, they field a total of 4,566 courses for an average of 95 courses per institution. Eleven public baccalaureate institutions field a total of 1,099 courses, or an average of 100 courses per institution. (The University of Illinois at Springfield currently does not have a general education program). Thirty-six independent institutions participate in IAI and field a total of 1,755 courses, or an average of 49 courses per institution.

Participation in the major panels can vary significantly based on the array of majors offered by an institution—not all institutions offer a full complement of majors. Forty-eight public community colleges offer courses to help students prepare for transfer to baccalaureate institutions. Participation by both public and private four-year colleges and universities is also very important in helping students transfer easily among institutions. Twelve public universities are actively involved in many of the major panels, and the public institutions tend to offer the broadest array of program majors (due, in part, to both their broad missions and their size). The majority of community college students transfer to public universities. Twenty-seven two- and four-year independent institutions participate in various major panels as well.

The 48 two-year public institutions field a total of 6,755 courses for transfer to a major, for an average of 141 courses per institution. In general, community colleges offer courses to prepare students for all majors. The twelve four-year public universities field a total of 1,550 courses in majors, for an average of 125 courses per institution. Six of the public universities offer coursework in 20 to 24 of the majors; the other six range from 12 to 19. The difference in the number of majors “covered” reflects the program arrays at the various institutions. Not all universities offer degrees in agriculture, clinical laboratory science, social work, or engineering,

for example. Twenty-seven independent institutions field 1,750 major courses, for an average of 65 courses per institution.

The website has seen a marked increase in use since last year. The increase may also be seen by comparing last year's lowest monthly hit rate of 84,541 in December, to this year's lowest monthly hit rate recorded in November of 97,367—a 15.2 percent increase. If one compares the highest monthly hit rate of last year, 160,404 hits in April, to the highest monthly hit rate of this year, 189,480 hits in August, an even greater increase is noted. The difference in the highest monthly hit rates is 29,076 hits, or an 18.2 percent increase. Last year the website received over 1.3 million hits. This year the website received over 1.7 million hits—an increase of 30.8 percent.

Increasing Student Awareness of IAI

In the spring of 2001, a small, informal survey was undertaken by staff to determine how institutions were presenting and promoting the IAI on their websites. The websites of all public universities and community colleges were examined for their ease in accessing information about transfer/the IAI, and the [iTransfer](#) website. In general, IAI received low visibility on institutional websites and catalogues. The IBHE and ICCB coordinators and the Steering Panel will explore these findings in the coming year to determine how best to market IAI for student and advisor use, and how to increase student awareness of IAI. Marketing effectiveness should emphasize exploring what can be done to make IAI more accessible and user friendly to students.

2000-2001 Summary of Activities

In general, the year 2000-2001 can be characterized as a year of transition and consolidation of past program strengths in which the IAI:

- Continued the fifth-year review process to ensure comparability in the curriculum;
- Consolidated the foundations of IAI and changed staff leadership at IBHE;
- Shifted from development and implementation to maintenance;
- Established a new panel with the formal endorsement of the Sociology major;
- Explored concerns and sought consensus on resolutions;
- The Steering Panel recommended development of guidelines for a new panel in Physics;
- Experienced a marked increase in the usage of the IAI website.

Considerations for the Future

There are three areas affecting the overall operation of IAI that would likely improve the effectiveness of IAI in the long term. After discussions of these matters in the coming year with the IAI panels and Steering Committee, recommendations may be developed and brought to the Board.

Measuring IAI Effectiveness—Data Needs

There are important gaps in our data. The Illinois Board of Higher Education currently has no systematic way of knowing definitively how effectively IAI is serving individual student needs.

- The lack of a centralized, integrated student unit record system means that we cannot track students across institutions, systems, or sectors.
- The current Shared Enrollment and Degree files do not allow for effectively tracking students transferring from community colleges to public universities, and the files do not include complete data from private institutions.
- Currently, institutions do not automatically analyze and stamp transcripts as “IAI certified.” Instead, students must initiate a request to receive IAI designation on their student records.

To better understand the impact of the IAI on student course-taking behavior and on timely baccalaureate degree completion, an expanded and improved student unit record system would allow for systematic analysis of student enrollment patterns across multiple systems.

Measuring IAI Effectiveness—Refining IAI Learning Outcomes

The Illinois Commitment requires that all institutions have program assessment in place by 2004. Because IAI is a central piece of the curriculum of over 100 institutions in the state, it is important that the IAI participants review and clarify, where necessary, the goals of the IAI curriculum and clearly identify the anticipated student learning outcomes. By further clarifying student learning outcomes and the goals and objectives of the GECC, institutions will be better able to evaluate the effectiveness of the IAI general education program.

Measuring IAI Effectiveness—Enhancing Student Transferability

Staff continues to study ways of improving transfer services to students, and making transferability between all institutions in the state easier and smoother. As the popularity of the *iTransfer* website grows, students will come to depend upon having access to even more information to assist them in making decisions about academic programs and institutions.

Recently, IBHE and ICCB staff members, representatives of the Steering Panel, and the Technical Task Force members reviewed a web-based software package that would build on services of the existing IAI website. The Course Applicability System (CAS), which is owned and licensed by Miami University of Ohio, is a powerful tool to help institutions serve native and transfer students better, faster, and more efficiently. Where this system is used, students interested in transferring may submit their course work to any institution on the CAS statewide network for evaluation against *any* academic program at that institution—general education or major/minor—as well as all graduation requirements. It gives transfer students what they want—information about transferability to any institution and any academic program in the state. This is an important consumer education and choice tool. The CAS, or a program like it, would allow Illinois to establish a statewide network that would be accessible to every student in the state, move the IAI to the next level of institutionalization, and greatly expand transfer information to all students in the state.

Staff will continue to explore other best practice options for enhancing student access to information about transfer of credits among institutions.

**IAI STEERING PANEL MEMBERSHIP
2000-2001**

General Education Field Panel Representatives

Esther DiMarzio, Kishwaukee College
Margaret Dust, Chicago State University
James Hajek, Lincoln Land Community College
Thomas Joswick, Western Illinois University
Kenneth Nordin, Benedictine University
John Norton, Moraine Valley Community College
James O'Leary, South Suburban College
Linda Sons, Northern Illinois University
Gary Trammell, University of Illinois at Springfield
Denis Wright, Joliet Junior College **CO-CHAIR**

Public University [At-large] Representatives

Mary Herrington-Perry, Eastern Illinois University
David Kay, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Charles Miller, Northern Illinois University
Gerald Pogatshnik, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, **CO-CHAIR**

Community College [At-large] Representatives

Charles Beetz, Parkland College
Julie Fleenor, William Rainey Harper College
John Bennett, Lake Land College
Libby Roeger, Shawnee Community College
Linda Uzureau, Prairie State College
Margot Vance, Illinois Central College
Girard Weber, Heartland Community College

Private Institution [At-large] Representatives

Lois Backas, Roosevelt University
Francine Navakas, North Central College
Gary Wenzel, Concordia University

Illinois Transfer Coordinators' Representatives

Marilyn Murphy, University of Illinois
Sheryl Paul, University of St. Francis
Fred Peterson, Heartland Community College

