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December 22, 2021

TO: Governor JB Pritzker
Members of the Illinois General Assembly
P-20 Council Members

FROM: Ginger Ostro, Executive Director

RE: Annual Joint Report of the Illinois Articulation Initiative
(Public Act 99-636)

The Illinois Articulation Initiative Act directs the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) to report annually to the General Assembly, the Governor, and the Illinois P-20 Council on the status of the Illinois Articulation Initiative and the implementation of this Act.

This report was informed by data collected by the Illinois Articulation Initiative, Illinois State University, the Illinois Board of Higher Education, and the Illinois Community College Board.

I am pleased to submit to you this report, prepared in collaboration with the ICCB.

CC: Legislative Research Unit
Illinois State Library

**ANNUAL REPORT
ON THE ILLINOIS ARTICULATION INITIATIVE
2021**



December 2021
Illinois Board of Higher Education

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Executive Summary

As part of the annual review of transfer under the Illinois Articulation Initiative Act, the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), and the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) as an entity jointly prepared this report on the state of seamless transfer among and between Illinois' 110 public community colleges and universities and participating private institutions.

In response to the pandemic, the IAI, IBHE, and ICCB provided guidance to institutions shifting courses to remote learning to ensure the 9,000 currently active IAI-approved courses remained transferable and to ensure students who selected to receive pass/fail grades during the pandemic could transfer coursework with pass/fail grades at any point in the future. In Fiscal Year 2021 (Academic Year 2020-2021) and despite the pandemic, institutions submitted and IAI panels reviewed 1,037 courses across six General Education and 21 Major panels. Of those submitted, 662 courses received IAI approval for transfer.

Among the 41,042 students who transferred in Fiscal Year 2021, more than 7,000 students completed an IAI-approved General Education Core Curriculum (GECC) credential, indicating that those students completed their lower-division general education coursework and would be automatically granted "junior" status at the IAI-participating four-year institution that receives them as transfer students.

Faculty and institutional participation remained high in Fiscal Year 2021: 126 faculty from public four-year institutions, 181 faculty from public two-year institutions, and 36 faculty from private institutions participated in the six General Education and 21 Major courses. Meanwhile, 48 public community colleges, 12 public universities, and 19 private institutions submit courses to IAI for approval as transfer courses and receive IAI-approved courses, while 31 private institutions receive IAI-approved courses for transfer.

As a matter of evaluation, the Boards look at the number of courses submitted and reviewed by panels, faculty and institutional participation, and overall administration of the IAI. IBHE and ICCB staff serve as GECC and Major panel managers, provide policy guidance, and serve as external communications services. The Boards and the IAI meet annually to discuss and evaluate the work of the previous year, collaborate on developing and implementing IAI policies and procedures, and recruit faculty.

This report serves as the required IAI annual report to the Illinois General Assembly under the Illinois Articulation Initiative Act.¹

COVID-19 Updates

The Coronavirus forced all Illinois public and private institutions to shift to alternative teaching and grading methods. In the spring of 2020, the IAI State Director worked with the IBHE and ICCB staff and key stakeholders throughout the state to establish and widely distribute institutional COVID-19 guidance regarding course modalities and grading policies for IAI-approved courses. The following guidance memos were released to provide flexibility during the pandemic for science lab and speech courses as well as grading policies for IAI-approved courses:

- [COVID-19 Guidance - Online Labs & Speech - Through Summer 2022](#)
- [COVID-19 Guidance - FAQ for IAI Course Grading per SB 1569](#)
- [COVID-19 Guidance - Pass/Fail Grades in IAI - Updated for Spring 2020 and Summer 2020](#)
- [COVID-19 UPDATES - IBHE Institutional Information](#)

¹ P.A. 99-636, eff. 1-1-17

GECC Package at Public Institutions

In January 2019, the Illinois Community College Board officially launched the General Education Core Curriculum (IAI GECC Credential or GECC package) for all 48 community colleges. All colleges and universities participating in IAI agree to accept a completed IAI GECC package in lieu of their own comparable lower-division general education requirements. The IAI GECC package consists of 37–41 semester credit hours in communications, humanities and fine arts, social and behavioral sciences, life and physical sciences, and mathematics and now appears on students' community college transcripts when transferring the completed package to another Illinois institution.

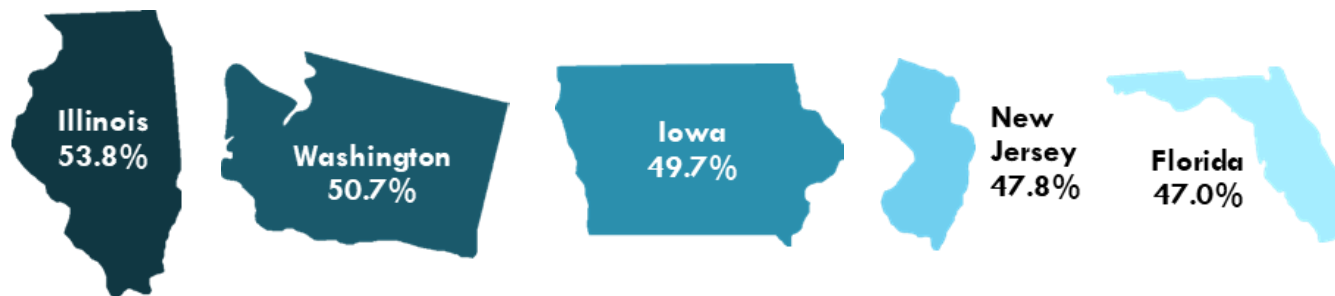
Students who complete the IAI GECC package at a community college can now transfer the package as a credential, which is guaranteed to be accepted by all IAI-participating institutions and, with some exceptions, fulfills the accepting institution's general education requirements.² Students pursuing an Associate of Science degree do not complete the IAI GECC package until they transfer to the four-year university due to the additional math and/or science courses necessary to be on track for junior standing status in a STEM major. However, once the additional Humanities & Fine Arts and Social & Behavioral Sciences courses are completed at the receiving four-year institution, students can reverse-transfer³ their completed lower-division coursework to the sending community college if the student wishes to get the GECC Package credential transcribed.

In Fiscal Year 2021, more than 7,400 students completed a GECC credential from a community college, which enables those students to enter a baccalaureate institution as a junior. Further, granting GECC-credentialed students junior status unlocks upper-division coursework to transfer students, saving them time and money to degree completion.

Success with Transfer

The IAI is a model for transfer initiatives in other states, including Indiana, Missouri, and California. Nationally, Illinois is a leader in successful degree completions among transfer students:

The five states with the highest bachelor's completion rates⁴ among students who started at a community college (transfer-out) are:

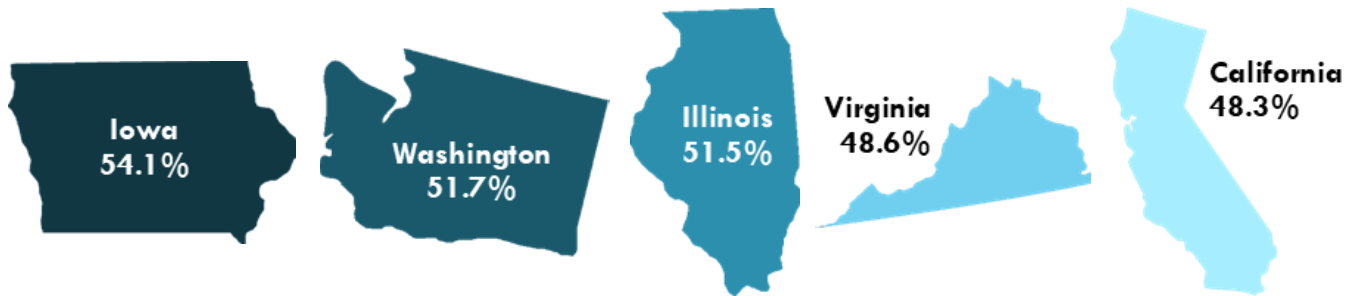


² Section 20(b) of the IAI Act

³ Under the Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act (amended: PA 100-824), "reverse transfer" means that a former community college student who completed at least 15 hours of coursework at the community college and is now attending a public university may apply for an associate degree using requisite courses earned at the university. Through reverse transfer, these individuals have the potential to "transfer back" university courses that count toward an associate degree and earn that associate degree even while they are in progress to completing the baccalaureate degree.

⁴ National Student Clearinghouse (2017) definition of "**transfer-out bachelor's completion rate**" is: "The number of transfer students who started at the community college and earned a bachelor's degree from any four-year institution within six years of community college entry, divided by the number of transfer students in the community college's fall 2010 cohort." Unit of analysis: CC. See page 5: https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SignatureReport13_corrected.pdf

The five states with the highest bachelor's completion rates⁵ among students who transferred-in to a baccalaureate institution are:



IAI and A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth⁶

On June 15, 2021, Illinois approved a new higher education strategic plan, [A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth](#), which articulates 25 strategies to achieve the three goals of Equity, Sustainability, and Growth. Specifically, this report demonstrates IAI's contributions to achieving Growth Strategy #8 via seamless transfer and reverse transfer, ensuring that transfer students, who often identify as first-generation, low-income, rural, working adults, and/or students of color, complete a baccalaureate within an appropriate timeframe and as affordably as possible. The seamless transfer created by IAI supports students' ability to transfer between and among Illinois' degree-granting institutions and is an important tool for achieving the goals of Illinois' higher education strategic plan:

Growth Strategy #8

Students increasingly take courses at multiple institutions of higher education to earn their degrees. However, without careful attention and alignment, students can also accumulate credits that are not recognized at subsequent institutions, with the result that their time to and cost of degree is extended. The IBHE and ICCB, working in cooperation with transfer leaders across the state, identified ways to enhance transfer so that adults with some college but no degree can finish their degrees. In 2019-2020, the agencies also undertook a study of options for improving the state's transfer infrastructure.

- **Create a state communications campaign** to locate and target adults who hold substantial college credits about their options to finish up a degree or be awarded a degree for which they are already eligible.
- **Publicize and scale options for reverse transfer** so that individuals who transferred from a community college prior to completing the associate degree can receive the associate degree while working toward a bachelor's degree; leverage reverse transfer options in certain STEM fields where it may be more efficient for the student to transfer before completing their associate degree.
- **Evaluate impact of public universities offering associate degrees** for students who may have to drop out before completing a bachelor's degree. If students have completed a course of study equivalent to an Associate of Arts degree at the university, they could be awarded the degree, reducing the number of people who leave school with some college but no degree. Evaluation should focus on potential near- and long-term impacts on the higher education ecosystem.
- **Develop strategies for maximizing transfer of degree-applicable courses** including math pathways and meta-majors.

⁵ National Student Clearinghouse (2017) definition of "**transfer-in bachelor's completion rate**" is: "The number of transfer students in the fall 2010 cohort who started at any community college and earned a bachelor's degree from the four-year institution within six years of community college entry, divided by the number of transfer students in the fall 2010 cohort who started at any community college and enrolled at the four-year institution. Transfer students who enrolled at multiple four-year institutions were counted for each four-year institution." Unit of analysis: 4-year. [See page 5: https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SignatureReport13_corrected.pdf](https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SignatureReport13_corrected.pdf)

⁶ <https://ibhestrategicplan.ibhe.org/IBHE-Strategic-Plan-2021.html>

- **Develop transfer options for students holding the Associate of Applied Science degree** and evaluate near-term and long-term impacts on the higher education ecosystem of establishing authority for community colleges to offer baccalaureate degree programs in specific fields.
- **Expand the use of 2+2, 3+1, and dual degree agreements** to ensure students have clear information about and coordinated advising for their academic journey
- **Launch a transfer guarantee initiative** that provides students with upfront information about their total cost, time to degree, and full details about their transfer path.
- **Enhance student information and advising about transfer** in relation to high-demand majors, majors with specific licensure requirements, and institution-specific requirements for graduation at receiving institutions.
- **Provide stable funding for the Illinois Articulation Initiative and the MyCredits Transfer/ Transferology tool.** These state systems and tools ensure that students who are taking courses and have a major in mind but do not know what baccalaureate institution they want to transfer to have the information and support they need for seamless transfer to their four-year institution.

Institutional Participation

The Act mandates all Illinois public two-year and four-year institutions to participate in IAI as Full Participants by submitting and reviewing courses for IAI approval; maintaining a complete IAI General Education Core Curriculum package (GECC package); and, if applicable to the institution, maintaining up to four major courses approved for transfer.⁷ IAI staff conduct an annual audit to ensure public institutional compliance with the Act.

IAI Fiscal Year 2021 Quick Facts:

Total Number of Institutions	110
Full Participating Institutions ⁸	79
Public	60
Private	19
Receiving-Only Institutions ⁹	31
Private	31

Academic Year 2020 Total Transfer Population¹⁰ 41,042

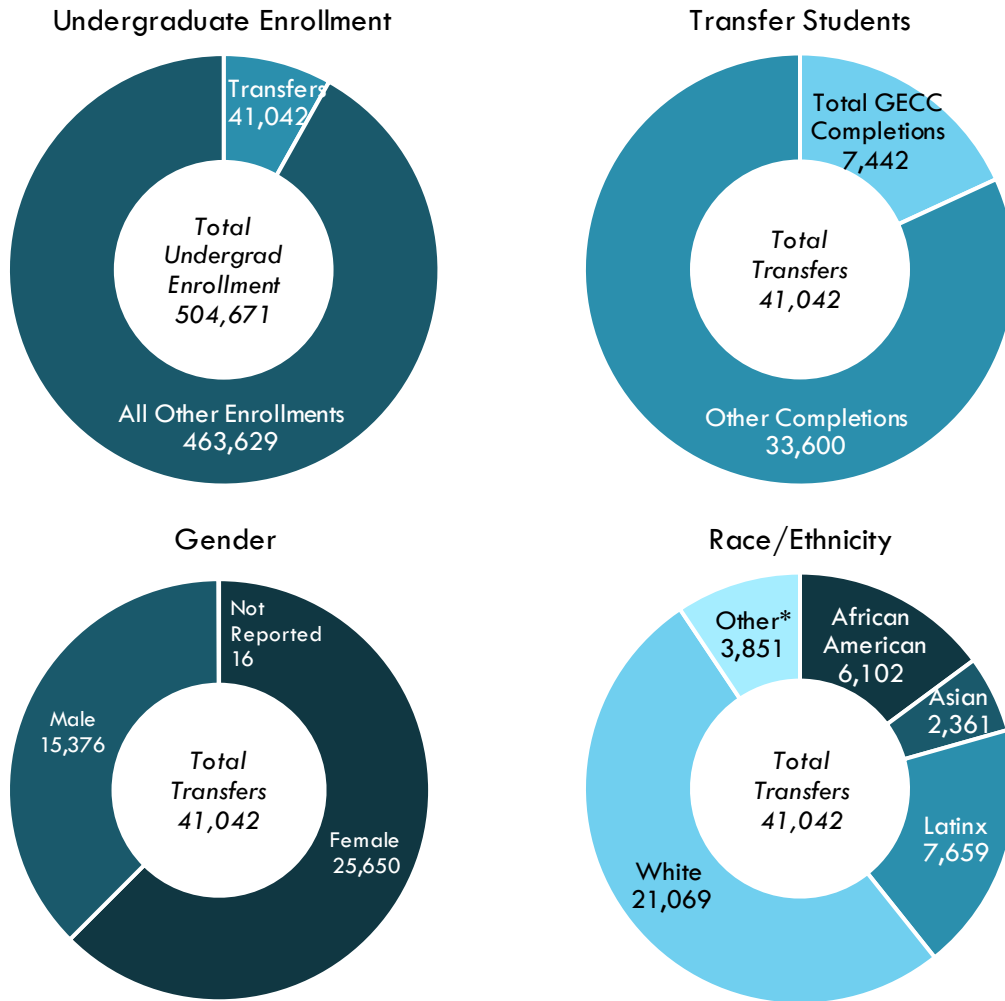
⁷ 110 ILCS 152/1

⁸ Full Participating Institutions are required to be accredited by the Higher Learning Commission or other regional accreditor; seek approval for and maintain a complete GECC package; agree to accept as meeting all lower-division general education requirements of the institution a completed GECC package from any other participating institution. Source: *Policies and Procedures Manual for the Illinois Articulation Initiative*. Illinois Board of Higher Education, Illinois Community College Board: 2020.

⁹ Receiving-Only institutions agree to accept as meeting all lower-division general education requirements of the institution a completed GECC package from any other participating institution. Institutional references to IAI must include a receiving-only disclaimer. Receiving institutions will allow transfer-in students with a partially completed GECC package the option of completing the GECC after transfer under certain conditions. Source: *Policies and Procedures Manual for the Illinois Articulation Initiative*. Illinois Board of Higher Education, Illinois Community College Board: 2020.

¹⁰ IBHE Information Management and Research: IHEIS Fall Enrollment Collection and Fall Enrollment Survey II; ICCB Centralized Data System – Fall Enrollment 2020

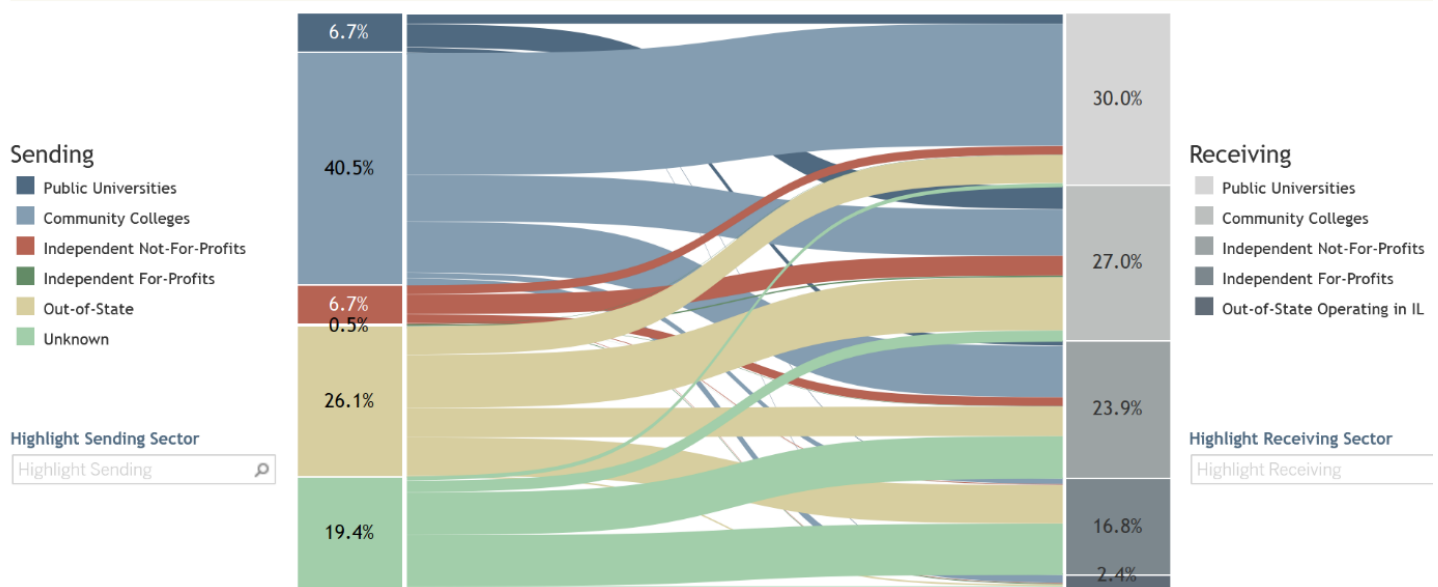
The chart below, generated from IBHE's [Transfer Dashboard](#), shows the total transfer population (41,042) as a portion of Total Undergraduate Enrollment (504,671) by gender and race/ethnicity. Not included in the chart is ICCB's preliminary number of transfer students earning a GECC package credential, equaling approximately, 7,442.



*The Other category includes: Native American and Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, Multiracial, International, and No Report

The 2020 Transfer Student Distribution chart¹¹ below, generated from IBHE's [Transfer Dashboard](#), shows the flow of transfer students from the sending institutions to the receiving institutions demonstrating that the majority of transfer students flow from public community colleges to public universities.

Distribution of Sending Sector by Receiving Sector



Panel Information

The IAI GECC and Major faculty panels serve as the foundation for IAI course review. Each fully participating institution must provide appropriate and qualified full-time faculty to serve three-year terms on relevant panels. In addition, seats on each panel are reserved for one executive or staff-level institutional representative to provide institutional perspective. There are currently six general education (GECC) panels and 15 active major panels in which faculty meet to review new and ongoing courses every spring and fall; only full-participating institutions or institutions working toward becoming full participants submit courses for review.

Faculty Participation on the IAI GECC and Major Panels:

Total Faculty	343
Public Four-Year Faculty	126
Public Two-Year Faculty	181
Private Institution Faculty	36

Panel Process

For a course to receive IAI approval, a participating institution must submit a representative course syllabus and other applicable course materials (e.g., sample labs) to the appropriate GECC or Major panel for review. All panels meet in the spring and fall semesters to determine each course's alignment to a panel's course descriptors and approval criteria. The iManage system and the iTransfer database are the IAI's formal database and information repository, respectively, for all course submissions, panel decisions, and faculty and institutional participant access to course submission materials. If a course is approved by a panel, it receives an IAI Code

¹¹ IBHE's Fall Enrollment Collection and Fall Enrollment Survey II; ICCB's Centralized Data System – Fall Enrollment

assignment communicating to students and institutions' registrars that the course has been approved for transfer by the IAI. Students and institutions may access the iTransfer website to determine whether a course at a particular institution has received IAI approval and an associated course code, indicating approval for transfer.

IAI Panel Activity Quick Facts:

GECC Panels	
# GECC Panels	6
GECC Course Descriptors	197
Active GECC Courses	6,670
Major Panels ¹²	
# Major Panels	15
Major Course Descriptors	180
Active Major Courses	2,372
Total Active Courses (GECC and Major)	
	9,042
Total #Courses Submitted for Fiscal Year 2021 Review	1,037
# Approved	662
# Sent Back for More Information	259
# Returned to Institution Unapproved	116

Along with the IAI, the IBHE and ICCB assist in ensuring institutional participation and adequate course submissions in IAI General Education and Major panels, faculty and institutional representation in the process, and compliance with the Act.

IAI History and Transfer in Illinois

The Illinois Articulation Initiative, created in 1993 as a joint effort between the Illinois Board of Higher Education, the Illinois Community College Board, and transfer coordinators from Illinois colleges and universities, is a mature, coordinated, well-functioning statewide system that serves an average of nearly 48,000 transfer students annually¹³ and includes 110 participating public and private institutions. The IAI was designed to support students who have not necessarily determined the specific major(s) they want to pursue or the particular institution(s) to which they would like to transfer. The need for and importance of “seamless transfer” among and between Illinois’ degree-granting institutions was codified in 2017 by the Illinois General Assembly in the Illinois Articulation Initiative Act (the Act) (110 ILCS 152/1). The Act mandates the IBHE and ICCB to:

- (a) . . . co-manage the implementation, oversight, and evaluation of the Illinois Articulation Initiative. . . and
- (b) The Board of Higher Education and the Illinois Community College Board shall provide a joint report on an annual basis to the General Assembly, the Governor, and the Illinois P-20 Council on the status of the Illinois Articulation Initiative and the implementation of this Act” (Source: P. A. 99-636, eff. 1-1-17)

...and requires all Illinois public community colleges and universities:
to participate in IAI; maintain a complete GECC package; accept all courses approved for IAI GECC codes for transfer as fulfilling parts of the GECC package; and to prohibit additional lower-division general

¹³ Annually 2016-2020 for undergraduate degree-seeking students only; non-degree-seeking students are not included in transfer data since 2016.

education course requirements for students with a complete GECC package. (Source: P. A. 99-636, eff. 1-1-17).

The IAI has been administratively housed and supported via State funds at Illinois State University (ISU) since 1997, a pivotal move by the Boards that, because ISU initiated the iTransfer website that year, created a comprehensive transfer system in Illinois and enabled the launch of a fully functioning IAI and GECC Package in 1998. The IAI staff consists of a full-time director, coordinator, and system programmer as well as a part-time technology/programming consultant. IBHE and ICCB staff serve as GECC and Major panel managers and provide policy and other guidance and external communications services.

Faculty from public community colleges and universities and participating private institutions from across the state take responsibility for ensuring that GECC and lower-division major courses meet expected standards of quality and rigor, ensuring that receiving IAI-approved courses meet accepted standards for general education and prepare transfer students for upper-division and major coursework; faculty participation in IAI panels is key to seamless transfer in Illinois and student success. In Fiscal Year 2021, 21 IAI panels comprised of 343 faculty¹⁴ reviewed 1,037 courses. IAI maintains more than 9,000 active general education and major courses across 197 course categories. Once approved, courses are reviewed by faculty panels regularly, ensuring that IAI-approved courses remain relevant, adhere to IAI policies, and provide students and institutions confidence in the integrity of transferred coursework.¹⁵

Today, Illinois is recognized nationally as a model for transfer student success and now leads the nation in bachelor's degree completion rates among community college students who transfer to four-year colleges, significantly exceeding the national average.¹⁶ This success comes from a nearly 25-year history of coordinating the transfer needs of an average 48,000 students annually through the Illinois Articulation Initiative, which serves students and their families by guaranteeing transferability of approved courses. The IAI serves Illinois' institutions by ensuring approved courses retain integrity, remain relevant and applicable, and provide the appropriate rigor and preparation expected of college-level courses. These dual features of IAI are intentional and vital to seamless transfer and to ensuring student success.

¹⁴ Number of faculty varies year to year, with more than 400 faculty in 2019 and 343 faculty in FY21.

¹⁵ Updated and revised from Executive Summary, STAR Act and SJR 22 Report, Jan. 31, 2020.

¹⁶ Transfer Success in Illinois: IBHE DataPoint, 2018. <https://www.ibhe.org/DataPoints/DataPoint-Transfer-Success-in-Illinois.html>