

Chair Atkinson, Members of the Board, IBHE Staff, and Guests:

As I begin the Faculty Advisory Council update to the Illinois Board of Higher Education this afternoon, I want to take a brief moment to let faculty at every institution of higher education throughout our great state know how very proud I am to serve with each of you. In a year that has brought tumultuous challenges in the form of strikes at four of our public universities, I want to let all faculty know that the FAC fully stands in support of them and their continued efforts. I am proud of our faculty's faithful dedication to our mission, their resolve to remain unparalleled experts within their disciplines, and their committed support and profound care for our students here in Illinois. And to that, I say to our faculty: "Job well done, my friends. Thank you"!

Now, I'd like to turn your attention to the steadfast work that our 36-member Faculty Advisory Council has done throughout the past year. As you know, our Council consists of three caucuses: 12 faculty members from the 4-Year Public Universities Caucus, 12 faculty members from the 2-Year Colleges Caucus, and 12 faculty members from Private and Independent Universities and Colleges Caucus. The FAC has formulated 6 Working Groups, where we have focused our individual research interests, knowledge, and expertise, and I'd like to share a brief update from each of these Working Groups.

1. Equity Working Group

The first FAC Working Group is the Equity Working Group. At the March 15 IBHE meeting conducted at Malcolm X College in Chicago, Professor Julie Clemens, from Illinois Central College and the FAC Equity WG chairperson, updated the Board on the Working Group's activities. The Equity WG maintains a strong alliance with the IBHE Strategic Plan in that equity issues in higher education must remain a foundational element in all conversations related to policy and funding across Illinois.

At the March 15th meeting, Professor Clemens shared that diverse faculty recruitment, hiring, support, and retention practices are key factors in the effort to increase academic success for students of color. To do this, we must focus on three essential components including first, developing a pipeline to advanced degrees for underrepresented students.

Secondly, we believe faculty recruiting is crucial. Higher education institutions must be intentional in their recruiting and hiring practices, with attention to clear and concise job postings that attract a full range of qualified candidates, proactive recruiting practices to find and attract diverse prospects, and carefully planned screening and interviewing practices to ensure that ALL candidates experience a level playing field. And third, through Retention where Institutions need to support faculty and staff of color through mechanisms to build relationships and collegiality across the institution and by being aware of overwork for faculty and staff of color, as they may be required to serve on additional committees and mentor and advise additional students because of their diverse backgrounds.

In addition, faculty development is significant. Faculty members of all races and backgrounds need intentional, effective training related to racial equity

Furthermore, student support and resources are critical, and back in March, Professor Clemens shared with the Board a document titled, “Equity Tools and Resources for Faculty Engagement”, and we continue to build upon these tools and resources throughout the 2023-2024 academic year.

2. Early College Consideration Working Group

The next Working Group I’d like to share with you is the Early College Consideration group.

This Working group’s primary accomplishment was producing the Early College Considerations document as a kind of student bill of rights. The document titled , “Early College, What to Consider?”, which was approved by the FAC back in February, is designed to be shared with high school students and their parents, as well as high school administrators, teachers, and advisors. It describes the potential benefits and costs of taking early college course credit in high school, in areas such as financial cost, credit transfer, college completion, course quality and rigor, and the nature of the college experience.

Some recurring themes in our early college conversations included the following:

- 1) concern about the rush to offer college to high school and even to middle school students;
- 2) encountering an unwillingness among students to read or have other outside-of-class expectations in high school-located dual credit courses which often carries over into expectations of workload in college after high school;
- 3) worries about the emotional and intellectual maturity levels of high school students in early college courses;
- 4) students taking early college courses who may not be academically prepared for them;
- 5) and math credentials on paper not matching what students were actually able to do in subsequent college math and STEM courses.

There is energy to continue to name and address the unintended consequences of early college, on students, and on scholars and their disciplines, and this work will continue through the upcoming academic year.

3. Higher Education Funding Working Group

The third FAC Working Group is the Higher Education Funding Working Group. The WG began the year by discussing the work of the Commission on Equitable Public University Funding. The Working Group had been told by several legislators that the state was exploring performance-based funding models, and the group was surprised to learn that the Commission was pursuing an adequacy model. Building upon what is seen as a successful K-12 funding model, the Commission set out to develop a similar model for higher education funding in Illinois.

Our working group discussions have focused on understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the adequacy model being developed by the IBHE Technical Modeling group, as it was being developed for higher education. In particular, the group has been especially concerned that such a model recognizes components of higher education that are not present in K-12. For example, the working group believes that the funding model should take an institution's mission into account. It should fund research, and it should be closely tied to the state's strategic plan, "A Thriving Illinois", for higher education.

Members of our working group have been attending the meetings of the Commission and its various working groups to keep abreast of its ongoing work. We have made public comment to express our opinions and to make the Commission aware of important ingredients to include in their model. Members' comments have encouraged the Technical Working Group to adequately address the breadth of various universities' missions as well as to be cognizant that equity isn't lost in the quest for adequacy.

4. Student and Faculty Mental Health Working Group

The fourth FAC Working Group is the Student and Faculty Mental Health working group. This Working Group shared updates with the Board and commented on the necessity of addressing gaps in mental health services on college campuses across Illinois, including training, peer support, and community-campus partnerships.

Work this year has focused on how to gather information about current needs and best practices for faculty, staff, and student mental health and to consider how to best disseminate the information found. Needs and resources are likely to vary by the type of institution as well as institutional context, and the breadth of membership of the FAC potentially provides a rich source of robust discussion that would address our diverse state population.

Additionally, the Working Group this year focused on continuing to gather information from the literature and from colleagues. Awareness of mental health needs at higher education institutions is increasing, and more wellness resources are being made

available, but utilization of resources is limited and focus tends to be on student mental health needs rather than campus community wellness.

5. College Affordability and Student Debt Working Group

The next FAC WG I'd like to discuss with you is the College Affordability and Student Debt Working Group.

This Working Group has been examining various issues involving both student debt and the overall affordability of a college education for would-be college students. The group's initial steps in this direction have been through information and data-gathering. The primary driver in our research was a focus from "free tuition" to "affordable education" and then to student debt.

As the WG began gathering data, the focus changed from a purely national perspective to mostly a state one. Starting with "free tuition" as a starting point, the Working Group quickly identified over 15 states with some claim to offering free tuition. What they found was that those claims were based on widely varying criteria, definitions, and stipulations. The Working Group decided to pare down the analysis to the states from the research that provided the strongest models for pursuing this, either on a national or state-by-state level, identifying: California, Delaware, Hawaii, Nevada, New York, and Tennessee. The group focused on states with specific programs which might serve as potential models: the Tennessee Promise, the Nevada Promise, and the Delaware SEED (Student Excellence Equal Degree) Scholarship. Eventually, the group identified the criteria that was worthy for examination: the definition of "free" tuition; student graduation rates; limited restrictions to a program; and how is the program funded—whether it is merit- or need-based.

The FAC College Affordability and Student Debt Working Group has just scratched the surface in improving student tuition funding, but as the group looks ahead to the 2023-2024 academic year, they have determined that the next tasks include a deeper dive into data collected on the 6 identified states as models for college funding plans, and to collect more data.

6. Prior Learning Assessment Working Group

Our final Working Group and our most recent addition is the Prior Learning Assessment Working Group.

The Working Group has written a STATEMENT ON AWARDING CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING IN ILLINOIS, which goes to the FAC for final approval at our meeting this Friday at Elmhurst University.

In the 2021 strategic plan for higher education in Illinois, “A Thriving Illinois”, increasing prior learning assessment of students to award credit for prior learning (CPL) was identified as a critical way to recruit, retain, and graduate adult students. This recommendation is supported by extensive national research into the effects on students when they’re offered prior learning assessment (PLA) opportunities such as professional credential review, academic program challenge exams, or portfolios that lead to awarding course credit.

Based on national findings, the FAC Working Group on Prior Learning Assessment and Credit urges the Board to work in coordination with the ICCB to develop a task force of faculty and administrators that engages Illinois institutions in the following:

- Conducting a review of their extant PLA awarding practices and policies, including their rates of awarding prior learning credit for each major, according to student demographics;
- Analyzing their acceptance of prior learning credit in transfer, by major and student demographics; and
- Creating a statewide system of policies and practices that mandate transferability of prior learning credit awarded through processes similar to those of the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI).

Once approved later this week, the Working Group would like to share its STATEMENT ON AWARDING CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING IN ILLINOIS and its findings with the Board.

CONCLUSION

In sum, as we progress through the summer and into Fall 2023, the Faculty Advisory Council hopes to continue our research and analysis within the six WGs, as well as further our individual and collective discussions of issues as they pertain to our three caucuses. Furthermore, the FAC wishes to continue its strong partnership with the Illinois Board of Higher Education by providing robust data, which we believe adds to the current features of the IBHE Strategic Plan, while also sharing the voice of faculty throughout the state. I expressly want to thank Chair Atkinson and the Board for allowing me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Faculty Advisory Council and to share our recent work with you. And finally, we, on the FAC, always welcome Board members to join us at future Council meetings. Thank you so very much.