

Chair Khothari, 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. The high quality of your teaching, the rigor of your research and scholarship, and the remarkable care you provide to our students, our colleagues, and our institutions are highly commendable. You may not always need to be reminded of the significant work you do throughout our state, but as Chair of the FAC, I do want to take the time to provide a prodigious “thank you” to each of you.

Now, I’d like to turn your attention to the resolute 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. I would like to share with you some of our caucus work from the past academic year.

1. The FAC’s 4-Year Public Universities Caucus discussed a wide range of topics this academic year. Most of the issues were raised by Caucus members in relation to issues on their own individual campuses. One of the key topics that were discussed this academic year included Artificial intelligence and its impact on higher education, and faculty shared AI policy statements for their syllabi. Additionally, caucus representatives from each campus shared university and college graduation requirements beyond basic general education courses. Another important topic the caucus discussed was the notion of Academic Freedom, and in light of several legislative bills in Florida and Texas, the caucus discussed whether they were seeing any restrictions to academic freedom in Illinois. Regarding workload issues, the caucus discussed how universities are increasing faculty workloads through additional administrative duties as well as dropping credit for labs as well as the impact this has on faculty. Finally, in October, the caucus met with the Council of Illinois University Senates at Illinois State University and shared how they might best be able to support each other’s efforts. In particular, they shared ideas regarding artificial intelligence, DEI initiatives, the presence of non-tenured faculty on FAC and University committees, and strategies in which faculty can best influence their Board of Trustees.
2. During the 2023-2024 academic year, the 2-Year Colleges Caucus worked on several important items, including developing a statement on the proposed legislation to offer bachelor’s degrees at 2-year institutions. Caucus representatives also discussed institutional equity plans and how they are being implemented, and they also discussed dual-credit and legislative bills surrounding it and met with former state legislator,

Roger Eddy, twice to have conversations on dual credit in the State of Illinois; in addition, the caucus discussed Model Partnership Agreements and random acts of dual-credit and their impacts. Furthermore, the Caucus discussed the issues relating to the Illinois Articulation Initiative and the proposed legislation for Common Course Numbering. The caucus discussed faculty overloads and the impact of assessment and program review at their campuses; the common fear among caucus representatives is that these overloads will result in greater loss of adjunct faculty, and increased effects on full time faculty members' workload.

3. The Private and Independent Universities and Colleges Caucus also discussed several significant issues throughout the past academic year. Similar to the 2-Year College Caucus, there have been changes in faculty workloads among private institutions, where some private institutions have increased teaching hours for the academic year without comparable pay increases, and some institutions are asking their faculty to engage in non-academic endeavors, such as marketing, recruitment, and retainment activities. Moreover, the caucus discussed institutional policies regarding extended medical leave for students, and due to these situations, some private institutions have created official policies and procedures for how to handle these situations. In March 2024, the caucus invited Dave Tretter, President of the Federation of Independent Illinois Colleges and Universities, to our meeting at Northern Illinois University and discussed several legislative bills that have been proposed in the Illinois General Assembly and their potential impact on the caucus institutions.

In addition to the work each caucus has done throughout the past year, the FAC continues to develop greater understanding of higher education issues through its six Working Groups, where we have focused our individual research interests, knowledge, and expertise. Now, I'd like to share a brief update from each of these Working Groups.

1. The Higher Education Funding Working Group has spent the last several years attending the online meetings of the IBHE Commission on Equitable Public University Funding as well as the meetings of the Commission's Technical Working Group. Higher Ed Funding Working Group members have made public comments at these meetings to help the Commission address what they see as shortcomings of the proposed funding formula. In addition, they have met with individual members of the Technical Working Group to deepen their understanding of the proposed funding formula and to express their views on the current undertakings. The Higher Education Funding Working Group will continue their efforts by attending legislative sessions discussing the funding formula and presenting their views to the relevant legislators.
2. The Early College and Dual Credit Working Group continued to deliberate strategies to communicate the concerns of their 2023 Early College Considerations document, which describes the potential benefits and costs of students taking early college course credit in high school, including in areas such as financial cost, credit transfer, college

completion, course quality and rigor, and the nature of the college experience. The Working Group tracked proposed amendments to the Dual Credit Quality Act, and met with its original drafter, Roger Eddy. Throughout the year, the Working Group continued to name and discuss the unintended consequences of current dual credit practices, such as a lack of limits on the number and types of dual credit courses taken by a high school student, allowing high school teachers without qualifying degrees to teach dual credit courses, taking dual credit courses in a high school rather than college setting, and high schools nudging out higher ed institutions in the selection of instructors and course content; the Working Group also discussed how this creates potential consequences for academic freedom, particularly when high school teachers are beholden more to their school boards than to the community college that ostensibly offers the course. Throughout the past year, the Working Group began to hear more anecdotes about students who took several early college course credits, but then did not perform well academically when they moved to a four-year institution and tried to jump into junior-level major degree courses, especially while living independently for the first time.

The Early College and Dual Credit Working Group will continue their work in the fall and will consider future ideas, including helping to develop amendments to the Dual Credit Quality Act that addresses concerns they perceive as faculty members, and crafting questions for possible meetings with those faculty and administrators who research and/or promote dual credit courses and policies.

3. Two years ago, at the request of the IBHE, the Equity Working Group prepared a paper and shared resources to support institutions preparing equity working plans. For the past academic year, the Equity Working Group focused on supporting equity and inclusion efforts in the classroom. The Working Group plans to aid faculty at every level of experience and engagement with equity work to have a tool kit that supports their efforts to make classrooms places where students and faculty are free to engage in the conversations and activities that create equity and inclusivity. The Working Group recognizes that both students and faculty may experience challenges and setbacks in these efforts. Such challenges and setbacks are neither new nor unique, and if the Working Group can help faculty share experiences and resources, then difficult days in the classroom can be building blocks for the teaching and learning processs, instead of stumbling blocks.
4. Throughout the past academic year, the Student and Faculty Mental Health Working Group focused on finalizing the version of faculty mental health resources to be posted to the IBHE-FAC website. Awareness of mental health needs at higher education institutions continues to increase, and more wellness resources are being made available; however, campus community wellness is an area that needs ongoing attention and resources. The Student and Mental Health Working Group will continue its efforts in the fall and will provide further updates to the IBHE in current issues and policy impacts.

5. The FAC Technology and Pedagogy in Higher Education Working Group spent several meetings discussing the use of technology and the subsequent integration in the classroom. Generative AI, specifically, in higher education for students and academic professionals, comes with both advantages and disadvantages. It is becoming apparent that even within the relatively narrow population of Higher Education professionals, two camps are breaking out. On the one hand, the Working Group believes there is a majority of enthusiasts, who champion the great promise of AI to make all sorts of minor tasks easier. These attitudes are strengthened and even amplified by the institutional imperatives of tech developers in the private sector who compete for funding, fame, and proprietary rights. On the other hand, the Working Group attests that there is a much smaller group of academic professionals who worry about humanistic, environmental, equitable, and even existential down-sides. While not wishing to exacerbate divides between the two camps, the Working Group wishes to signal certain realities and potentials that could develop into more grave concerns for which we all bear some responsibilities of thought, if not action. The Working Group has been working on a white paper this past year that focuses on some of the areas and topics to consider before implementing AI in the classroom. HB3563 requires the development of a Generative AI and Natural Language Processing Task Force that charges the group to recommend model policies for schools to address the use of generative AI by students in the classroom. The Working Group believes that the white paper will provide valuable insight to the Generative AI and Natural Language Processing Task Force regarding the faculty's perspective.
6. And finally, it's been a little more than a year since I last shared the work of our Prior Learning Assessment Working Group with you, at which time you expressed appreciation for both the need and the direction of their work—namely, to form a statewide task force that will map whether and how adult students' workplace learning is being acknowledged for college credit by our community colleges and universities. As you'll recall, the need for institutions to conduct PLA—prior learning assessment—and award credit for prior learning—CPL— was identified by the Board in “A Thriving Illinois” as a growth strategy for institutions. At our March FAC meeting conducted at Northern Illinois University, Chairman Pranav Kothari reified the Board's approval of this initiative and asked the IBHE Agency's representative to the Council to collaborate with the Working Group. This summer, baseline research into all Illinois institutions' forward-facing policies and personnel for conducting PLA and awarding credit will be conducted by the Working Group. Additionally, members will be solicited to serve on the Task Force for Academic Year 24-25. During this year, the Task Force will review the Working Group-compiled database of policies, practices, and processes in use at all institutions. They will identify student opportunity gaps in the use of PLA and CPL and make recommendations for remediating them.

In summary, as we progress through the summer and into Fall 2024, the Faculty Advisory Council hopes to continue our research and analysis within our six Working Groups, 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, while also sharing the voice of faculty throughout the state. I expressly want to thank Chair Kothari 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, as always, I warmly welcome all Board members to join us at a future FAC meeting. Thank you so very much.