

2025-2026 Student Advisory Committee Presentation to the IBHE Board

SAC Chair Raul Asante Adjei-Boateng & SAC Member Jacqueline Guzman | March 18, 2026

Opening Remarks

Presenters:

Chair Raul Asante Adjei-Boateng, Eastern Illinois University

SAC Member Jacqueline Guzman, University of Illinois – Springfield

Executive Committee Members:

Vice-Chair/Secretary Daci Finke - McKendree University

Traditional Student Board Member Carter Blount, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign

Non-Traditional Student Board Member Magnus Noble, University of Illinois – Springfield

Areas of Interest

- **Affordability & Funding**

- College Affordability
- MAP Grant Funding
- Open Educational Resources (OER)

- **Student Basic Needs**

- Food Insecurity
- Housing Insecurity
- Mental Health Support

- **Federal Challenges**

- International Student Enrollment
- Immigration Enforcement
- Student Loan Borrowing Caps
- Federal Research Funding
- Pell Grant Funding

Affordability and Funding

- *A Thriving Illinois*:
 - Identifies cost as a primary barrier to student access, persistence, and completion;
 - Emphasizes that affordability is a shared responsibility requiring stabilized and increased state funding to reduce institutions' reliance on tuition;
 - Highlights equity — the current funding formula is inadequate, inequitable, and disproportionately affects underserved populations.
- **Consistent with the goals of *A Thriving Illinois*, we urge IBHE to shift from a neutral stance to active support of the Adequate and Equitable Funding Formula for Public Universities (currently represented by SB0013).**

Affordability and Funding Monetary Award Program (MAP) Funding

- MAP remains one of Illinois' most effective mechanisms for supporting low-income and underrepresented students.
- Rising tuition has reduced MAP's purchasing power, leaving substantial unmet need.
- Funding limitations exclude some eligible students, especially community college students and late FAFSA filers.
- Expanding and modernizing MAP would reduce reliance on private loans, limit cost-related stop-outs, and improve on-time degree completion.

Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE). *Monetary Award Program (MAP) Funding History, FY2021–FY2025*. Budget and Legislative Materials

- **We recommend that IBHE, in partnership with ISAC, continue efforts to increase MAP funding toward the goal of \$1B and identify ways to modernize the MAP award process.**

Affordability and Funding Open Educational Resources (OER)

- Low-income students benefit immediately, reducing financial stress and the need to delay or drop courses due to cost.
- OER ensures day-one access to required materials, eliminating cost-related delays.
- Institutions with OER initiatives report higher course completion rates and, in some cases, improved student engagement.
- Traditional textbooks average over \$100; curriculum-wide OER adoption can reduce total cost of attendance by 5–10%.
- **We recommend that IBHE, in partnership with ICCB, work with the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC) to develop an OER adoption incentive program that includes professional development, recognition, and, where feasible, grant funding.**

Student Basic Needs Housing & Food Insecurity

- Many colleges and universities operate campus food pantries and partner with local food banks, yet food insecurity remains widespread among students.
- The cost of housing across the state continues to rise, presenting another financial barrier to student success.
- While grants and programs such as the existence of Benefits Navigators, HOUSE Liaisons, SUCCESS unit, and the End Student Housing Insecurity (ESHI) Grant, they are not well known.
- **Consistent with *A Thriving Illinois*, we recommend that IBHE partner with institutions to renew efforts to raise awareness of existing student basic needs assistance.**

Student Basic Needs Mental Health

- As noted in *A Thriving Illinois*, mental health is essential to student success.
- In 2020, the General Assembly enacted the Mental Health Early Action on Campus (MHEAC) Act to fund campus mental health initiatives at public universities.
- In FY2026, \$7M was appropriated to MHEAC and \$6.33M was awarded (via OMB).
- Many Community Colleges have expanded mental health services for students with limited resources, but additional support is needed.
- **We recommend that IBHE work with the Governor and the General Assembly to expand MHEAC to include Community Colleges and increase funding to \$15M.**

Federal Challenges

International Student Enrollment & Immigration Enforcement

- **Enrollment:** Visa delays, shifting work authorization rules, and federal immigration policies have reduced international student enrollment, negatively impacting access to education for international students and tuition revenue for institutions.
 - IBHE data shows overall enrollment of international students decreased by 1,918 students (-7.9%) in 2025-26.
 - Undergraduate enrollment of international students actually increased by 260 students (3%), but graduate enrollment decreased by 2,178 students (-14.1%).
- **Student Impact:** Visa restrictions and sponsorship uncertainty have increased employer reluctance to hire international students, reducing practical training opportunities that support career readiness for both domestic and international students.
- **Immigration Enforcement (ICE Impact):** Heightened immigration enforcement and compliance requirements have increased uncertainty for international students and intensified fear and instability for undocumented students, affecting perceptions of safety, stability, and employability.

Federal Challenges

Student Loan Caps & Research Funding

- **Student Loan Borrowing Caps:** New Federal student loan limits are not in line with rising tuition, housing, and living costs at Illinois institutions, reducing their effectiveness increasingly constraining graduate students' ability to afford their programs.
- **Federal Research Funding:** Growing uncertainty in federal research funding threatens Illinois public universities' ability to support research and student engagement, including paid undergraduate research, graduate assistantships, stipends, and tuition support; funding reductions disproportionately limit access for low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented students.

Federal Challenges Pell Grant Funding

- The Pell Grant has been level funded for the third consecutive year, maintaining the maximum award amount at \$7,395, eroding the value to students.
- If the maximum award amount had kept pace with inflation, it would be approximately \$7,800, according to the National College Attainment Network (NCAN).
- Workforce Pell may add between \$2B and \$6B additional burden according to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO).

Closing Remarks

The Student Advisory Committee appreciates the opportunity to share student perspectives on issues affecting higher education in Illinois. The topics discussed today address key factors influencing student access, affordability, and academic success. These remarks reflect the collective work of the Student Advisory Committee.

The Committee looks forward to continued engagement with the Board and IBHE staff in support of informed dialogue and student-centered outcomes.

The Committee thanks the Board and staff for their continued work and commitment to students.