

Illinois Community College Board

BACCALAUREATE ACCESS TASK FORCE REPORT

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Background of Community College Role in Baccalaureate Access. Illinois is prominently identified with the early history of the community and junior college movement in the United States. Joliet Junior College, established in 1901 in Joliet, Illinois, was the first public junior college in the nation. Illinois adopted its first junior college legislation in 1931, which permitted the Board of Education of Chicago to establish, manage, and provide for the maintenance of one junior college offering two years of college work beyond the high school level as part of the public school system of the city. The first Junior College Act became law on July 1, 1937, and provided for the development of the junior college system as a part of the public school system and in 1951 the Illinois General Assembly enacted legislation setting forth standards and procedures for establishing junior colleges.

As a result of recommendations of the Commission of Higher Education, legislation was adopted ten years later in 1961 creating the Illinois Board of Higher Education. According to the legislation, the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) had responsibility for conducting comprehensive studies on higher education needs; development of information systems; approval of new units of instruction, research, or public service in all public colleges and universities; budget review of public colleges and universities, with recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly; approval of all capital improvements; surveys and evaluation of higher education; and preparation of "a master plan for the development, expansion, integration, coordination, and efficient utilization of the facilities, curricula, and standards of higher education in the areas of teaching, research, and public service." Although junior colleges were legally under the jurisdiction of the superintendent of public instruction at this time, a section of the enabling legislation for the Illinois Board of Higher Education contained the following statement concerning junior colleges:

In the formulation of a master plan of higher education and in the discharge of its duties under this act, the board shall give consideration to the problems and attitudes of junior colleges...as they relate to the overall policies and problems of higher education.

In July 1964 the final draft of the higher education master plan was published. As a result, the Junior College Act of 1965, the foundation for today's system of public community colleges in Illinois, was adopted. On July 15, 1965, the Junior College Act became effective; and on August 1 the school boards of districts operating junior colleges with separate educational and building rates became the boards of the newly constituted Class II districts. (In 1973, the term "junior"

was changed to "community" in statute.) The Act of 1965 created a system of “comprehensive” community colleges that provide courses in liberal arts and sciences and general education; adult education courses; and courses in occupational, semi-technical or technical fields leading directly to employment.

Thus, two-thirds of a century after the establishment of Joliet Junior College, Illinois fully endorsed a policy that called for a system that supported a university and community college partnership approach to higher education. Although provision of the first two years of the baccalaureate degree has been a component of the community college movement in Illinois since early in its inception, the Higher Education Act of 1961 and the Junior College Act of 1965 set forth the current system of higher education that recognizes the need for strong public and private four-year institution and community colleges collaboration.

The partnerships have not always been smooth, but efforts to maintain relationships that best serve the students of Illinois have not waned. For many years the Baccalaureate Articulation Compact guided articulation efforts. These compacts, first proposed in the mid-1970's required that associate degree graduates be accepted at public universities in upper-division standing and guaranteed graduation after two more years of successful upper-division work in the same program. Instrumental in operationalizing compacts was the establishment of the Transfer Coordinators group comprised of a representative from each public or private university and each community college participating in a compact arrangement.

In the early 1990's, the Transfer Coordinators of Illinois Colleges and Universities, the Illinois Board of Higher Education, and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) recognized that while the Compacts had eliminated many barriers for students wanting to complete baccalaureate degrees, in many cases student transcripts were still being evaluated course by course and that students must complete a full transfer associate degree program to be eligible for compact consideration. Thus, students were in danger of facing undue obstacles to their hopes of accessing and obtaining four-year degrees. In 1993, the IBHE, ICCB, and Transfer Coordinators jointly launched the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) to facilitate the transfer of students among Illinois colleges and universities—public and private, associate and baccalaureate degree-granting. The initiative grew out of IBHE’s policies on Transfer and Articulation adopted in 1990. The Board’s policies contain a key concept around which the IAI was designed. That concept is that “associate and baccalaureate degree-granting institutions are equal partners in providing the first two years of Baccalaureate degree programs in Illinois. While each institution is ultimately responsible for the quality of the programs it provides, both associate and baccalaureate degree-granting institutions are expected to work together to assure that their lower-division baccalaureate programs are comparable in scope, quality, and intellectual rigor.”

Currently, more than 100 institutions of higher education participate in the IAI. The initiative identifies a common general education core of courses that participating institutions recognize as fulfilling their general education requirements although they may not be identical to their native student requirements. Thousands of students have transferred under the IAI agreements. Each course is reviewed by a panel of faculty members and approved as meeting the guidelines set

forth by IAI. Thus, if a course is IAI approved, the transferring institution accepts the course in transfer without question.

Additionally, the IAI has suggested lower division courses for nearly 40 discipline majors and has a process in which panels review courses for equivalency. There has been considerable discussion of the usefulness and efficiency of this process. A recent study conducted at the request of the Illinois Articulation Initiative Steering Panel was presented to the panel at its April 2005 meeting. The authors of the report suggest that faculty should be given rein to develop the IAI transfer curricula in the cooperative environment of the professional associations or through statewide conferences, but the practice of course-to-course approvals in the IAI majors should be discontinued.

A more recent development in assisting students in transferring from one institution to another in Illinois has been the development of the Course Applicability System (CAS). This system provides students with more specific and detailed information on how their coursework will transfer among institutions and how it may or may not count towards a baccalaureate degree. This web-based program allows students to enter the courses they have completed and compare them to degree requirements at participating schools. The General Assembly passed legislation which was signed by the Governor to mandate the implementation of such a system for all higher education in the state.

Baccalaureate Access Task Force. In spite of the advances made over the years, access to the baccalaureate remains an issue for many community college students. Each year approximately 23,000 students graduate from Illinois community colleges with associate degrees. Thirty-seven percent were awarded in transfer programs and the remaining 63 percent in career and technical education (CTE) programs. Only 16,000 students transfer annually from the 48 community colleges to the 9 public universities, 98 independent not-for-profit colleges and universities, and 29 independent for-profit in Illinois. Many of these students transfer without completing an associate degree prior to transferring. Thus, only a small portion of the 23,000 students who did earn associate degrees actually transfer to public and private colleges and universities in Illinois to pursue baccalaureate degrees.

Adequate data on the reasons for students not continuing their education are not available although indications are that although some students are not interested in more education, at least a portion of the students do not transfer due to their inability to relocate due to job and family responsibilities and/or because there are barriers for students who complete CTE degrees to transfer their courses into programs applicable to their fields of study. The reasons may be as varied as the types of institutions and the diversity in the geography of the state. However, it is precisely because of its rich history of educational, geographic, and demographic diversity that the state must grapple with ways to increase access to baccalaureate education.

In 2001, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) with support from the Lumina Foundation for Education launched a project entitled "Access to the Baccalaureate." The

purpose of the project was to 1) identify nonfinancial barriers to the baccalaureate at the state, system, and institution levels; 2) make recommendations for removing such barriers; and 3) work with institutions and policymakers to implement solutions. In its 2004 report, “Improving Access to the Baccalaureate”, the project says “In an economy that is increasingly complex, fast-changing, and global, education has become the new currency, securing better futures for individuals and continued progress for our nation. Ironically, at the same time, the need for higher learning has grown, barriers to accessing that learning have proliferated.”

These concerns, along with a proposal from one of the community colleges in Illinois to begin delivering selected baccalaureate degrees as one of the avenues for providing enhanced access to degree completion, created the need for higher education in Illinois to investigate access issues and reexamine state policies related to baccalaureate access particularly for community college students. Thus, in fall 2004, the Illinois Community College Board supported by the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), appointed a task force to review issues associated with baccalaureate degree access for community college students. The Task Force composition represents executive, administrative, instructional, and student constituencies at the community colleges plus representatives from the Illinois Board of Higher Education (staff and university representatives) and ICCB staff (see Attachment A) Dr. David R. Pierce, president emeritus of the American Association of Community Colleges, facilitates the Task Force, and Virginia McMillan, consultant and former executive vice president of the ICCB, chairs the group.

The Task Force was charged with examining the extent of the baccalaureate access issues in Illinois, examining options for addressing any issues that are identified during the examination, and making recommendations to the ICCB and the IBHE on what the Illinois community college position should be related to baccalaureate degree access.

The Task Force commenced its work in December, 2004. During its first organizational meeting, the Task Force members received copies of “Improving Access to the Baccalaureate” publication prepared by the AACCC and AASCU and were encouraged to carefully review the document as the work of the group progressed.

Initially, several specific topic areas were identified by Task Force members for study. These included the following topics: state and local resources, programmatic needs, financial aid, capital facility needs, workforce development/labor supply and differences in funding between public universities and community colleges, tuition, accreditation. During the course of their work, Task Force members reviewed information that had been gathered as a result of the Task Force’s initial meeting. The information reflected different approaches to addressing access. Task Force members received updated information on available baccalaureate programs in the state - those offered on public and private university campuses, university off-campus programs, programs offered on community college campuses, and those offered through technology. These materials were discussed and used by the Task Force subcommittees as they conducted their

work on examining appropriate mechanisms to increase baccalaureate access in the state. Discussion of these mechanisms is presented below.

Off-campus University Completion Programs. Twenty-seven Illinois community college districts have agreements with senior institutions to offer baccalaureate completion programs for their students. Seven public universities in the state offer degree programs on or near selected community college campuses - Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville, Eastern Illinois University, University of Illinois-Springfield, Northern Illinois University, and Governors State. Western Illinois University offers courses but not full degree options on at least two community college campuses.

Greenville College, McKendree College, University of St. Francis, Kendall College, Blackburn College, National Louis University, Dominican University, Roosevelt University, and Olivet Nazarene University, all private senior institutions also offer degree programs on several community college campuses. Additionally, at least three out-of-state universities offer programs on at least five community college campuses. These out-of-state institutions include Columbia College (Missouri), Franciscan University, and Midcontinent College (KY).

Similar to the one-on-one off-campus university completion program where one university offers degree programs on or near community college campuses, the multi-university center approach provides yet another approach where two or more universities are co-located and working in cooperation with one or more community colleges to deliver multiple degree programs in both face-to-face and distant learning modes. Currently, the University Center of Lake County and the Fox Valley University Center offer models worth examining. It is possible for centers of this nature to go beyond simply being co-located. Other models such as the East St. Louis Multi-Community College Center provide an associate degree model in which community colleges are not only co-located but share course work within degree programs.

An additional approach considered by the Task Force was extending the amount of community college credit that could be transferred and accepted by universities. Under this approach, universities and community colleges would articulate courses that are frequently considered both lower and/or upper division courses. A specified number of pre-determined courses beyond the associate degree can be taken at the community college and accepted by the university in transfer. Such models, often called 80/40, 75/45, 90/30 models, are currently available in other states. They are available on a limited basis in Illinois primarily, but not exclusively, through on-line delivery. Students have access to upper division courses at community college prices and at community college locations.

There was general consensus among the Task Force members that off-campus completion programs was one of the most advantageous way of addressing the problems of access for nontraditional, place-bound students. The major barrier appears to be financial. If it is not economically feasible for universities to offer completion programs off-campus, they will not be able to continue to operate the programs that currently exist much less offer new programs as

they are needed. The current system of funding for Illinois universities does not provide incentives for further collaboration with community colleges to offer innovative approaches to expanding access. The Task Force believes this issue should be examined further.

Electronic (On-line) Degree Completion Options. Twenty-two colleges have arrangements with several universities for electronic (on-line) provision of baccalaureate degree completion. Community colleges identified the following senior institutions as offering electronic degrees through these agreements in 2004. They include: Franklin University, Indiana University, Southern Illinois University, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, University of Phoenix, Northern Illinois University, University of Illinois-Springfield, Capella University, Regis University-Denver, Governors State University, Old Dominion University, St. Leo University-Florida, DeVry University, and University of St. Francis. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of universities currently offering on-line programs through cooperative agreements since new institutions are being added continuously. It should be noted that an increasing number of out-of-state institutions are entering into agreements with community colleges.

The Illinois Virtual Campus website identifies eighteen on-line baccalaureate degree programs.. Several of these are offered by universities included in the list of universities with cooperative arrangements with community colleges. However, several universities operating in Illinois offer on-line programs that have not been coordinated specifically with community colleges. These include programs offered by Judson College, Argosy University, Governors State University, Western Illinois University, Eastern Illinois University, Rush University, and DePaul University.

Community college students are very receptive to on-line course delivery. Data from the Illinois Virtual Campus for Spring 2005 indicated that community colleges offered 3,235 course sections generating enrollments of 39,950 students. Public universities offered 646 course sections with an enrollment of 12,779 and independent/private colleges and universities offered 2,045 sections with enrollments of 40,986. Data are not available on how many students enrolled in public and/or private university on-line courses were previously enrolled in community colleges.

The Task Force identified some barriers and benefits to baccalaureate degrees delivered electronically. Identified as possible barriers were 1) lack of access to equipment, 2) lack of technology skills; 3) learning style preferences; and 4) financial restraints. However, many community college students taking on-line courses have overcome most of these barriers and can do well in university courses if they were successful in community college on-line courses. The need for information on suggestions and guidelines about questions to ask and how to analyze information about online degrees and the institutions offering them was expressed. Benefits of on-line programs included their flexibility and the fact that geography is not a constraint.

Dual admission/enrollment. The Task Force examined dual student admission/enrollments for community colleges and universities. Several public universities have existing agreements with

community colleges to admit students to their institutions when a student is initially admitted to a community college. This works well for traditional students who know where they will be transferring and in what field of study they want to focus. Task Force members agreed that this approach is very positive but does not address issues of access for place-bound, nontraditional students if they had to leave their home environment to complete their baccalaureate degree programs. However, coupled with local baccalaureate completion (face-to-face or on-line) programs the place-bound student can experience similar benefits to those relocating to complete their degrees.

Expanded Degree Granting Authority. The Task Force reviewed information gathered from states where community colleges are offering Baccalaureate degrees. The information included which colleges were approved to offer programs as well as state policies pertaining to community college baccalaureate degrees. Currently, selected community colleges in fourteen states are offering baccalaureate degrees in selected program areas. The environments in which these degrees are offered vary considerably in financing structure, local access to higher education, cooperative efforts between institutions of higher education, how the baccalaureate approval has been implemented, governing structure, and the effects of the change. In most instances, these programs are in technical fields in which universities have limited program offerings and in many cases are offered in areas with limited geographical access to university programs. Advantages to this approach identified by the Task Force included: 1) expanding an existing associate degree program in an area of identified need to the baccalaureate level would allow the community college to leverage existing programmatic and capital resources by building on the infrastructure that is already in place; 2) if there is a documented unmet workforce need, the community college would be fulfilling its mission of providing educational and workforce development opportunities to the communities in the district; and 3) transfer from the lower division portion of the program to the upper division portion would be seamless. Disadvantages to this approach included: 1) additional state dollars would be required; 2) long term impact on structure and mission of the colleges; 3) diversion of resources from current programs and services to baccalaureate programs; and 4) potential negative impact on relationships between community colleges and universities. In general, the Task Force believes that in Illinois, the disadvantages associated with community colleges offering baccalaureate degrees currently outweigh the advantages of their doing so.

Another approach discussed in consideration of expanding degree granting authority, was to establish baccalaureate degrees programs offered jointly by a community college and a university. The community college would provide the degree coursework according to university standards and with university approval, but the university would grant the degree. Various versions of this approach were discussed by the Task Force. For example, upper division courses could be provided jointly by the community college and the university with the degree being awarded by the university in cooperation with the community college. The Task Force identified several benefits to these approaches. They included: 1) expanding existing associate degree programs would allow the community college to leverage existing programmatic and capital resources; 2) the issue of access for citizens in the community college district would be addressed; 3) a joint program would transcend transfer obstacles; 4) current

state program approval processes would likely accommodate this approach; 5) accreditation is less of an issue; and 6) access to both university and community college resources. An obstacle to this approach was that even though there may be a clearly identified need, a university may not have the capacity or willingness to expand its program. The Task Force concluded that variations to this latter limited expanded degree authority approach would be of value to Illinois higher education and its students.

Recommendations

The Task Force believes the most plausible way to maintain and enhance access to baccalaureate degree completion for community college students is to support and increase cooperative efforts between Illinois baccalaureate-degree granting institutions and community colleges. This can best be accomplished by:

1. Strengthening and expanding existing articulation efforts and transfer approaches (e.g. the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI), articulation agreements, dual admission agreements) for all community college students including those in transfer and career and technical education programs.
2. Encouraging the expansion and enhancement of more recent efforts to facilitate transfer. These efforts should include but not be limited to:
 - a. Baccalaureate degrees programs offered cooperatively and/or jointly by universities and community colleges through off-campus face-to-face or electronic arrangements.
 - b. Expanded dual admission initiatives between community colleges and four-year institutions that include student information on advantages of the programs.
 - c. Financial incentives that promote university off-campus face-to-face or electronic completion programs including but not limited to grants and/or differential tuition rates.
 - d. “Quick response” baccalaureate access needs analyses and a new program approval system that allows for rapid program delivery.
 - e. An extended-credit cooperative articulation model for selected programs that allows credits beyond the associate (transfer and career) degree to apply towards the baccalaureate degree (e.g. an 80/40 model, permits 80 credits of selected community college work to be applied to the baccalaureate degree).

To assist in moving these recommendations forward it is further recommended that:

1. A Baccalaureate Completion Grant be established to provide funds for Illinois universities to work with community colleges to establish off-campus (face-to-face and on-line) baccalaureate completion programs with the following parameters:
 - Institutions must be IAI participants
 - Institutions must make a multi-year commitment to establish and deliver programs
 - Grants must include at least one selected extended- credit completion program (e.g. 80/40, 75/45, 90/30, etc.)
 - At least one program must be open to all community college associate degree (Transfer and Career and Technical Education)recipients
 - Programs are to be articulated through ICCB to all community colleges
 - Programs are to be offered at public university in-state tuition rates
 - Programs are to include an optional accelerated degree attainment time lines.
2. A website and/or brochure be developed that offers suggestions and guidelines about questions students and advisors should ask and how they might analyze information about online degrees and the institutions offering them.

Finally, the Task Force recommends that community colleges in Illinois should not be given the authority to award baccalaureate degrees at this time. However, if such an approach were to be reconsidered in the future, the Task Force recommends that it should be undertaken only in specific instances where it would meet a clearly identified workforce need which cannot be met through affordable cooperative approaches with baccalaureate-degree granting institutions, and only then, when the state has determined that it is in the best interest of good public policy.

Conclusions

A recent report entitled “Improving Access to the Baccalaureate” produced by the American Association of Community Colleges and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities says “In an economy that is increasingly complex, fast changing, and global, education has become the new currency, securing better futures for individuals and continued progress for our nation. Ironically, at the same time the need for higher learning has grown, barriers to accessing that learning have proliferated.”

One of the major missions of community colleges is to assist in meeting the educational needs of the communities they serve. In Illinois, this traditionally has been done through a system of comprehensive community colleges that provide baccalaureate transfer (first two-years of the baccalaureate degree) education, career and technical education (including credit and non-credit preparation and upgrading for employment needs), adult education and literacy, and personal enrichment through non-credit coursework. The system serves nearly one million students a year providing access at times and locations convenient to the nontraditional populations it serves. Students include those from teens to senior citizens from all racial and ethnic backgrounds. For many, community colleges provide the only access to higher education opportunities in the state. Because of these factors community colleges are being asked to assist students in acquiring access to completion of baccalaureate degree education.

In fall 2004, the Illinois Community College Board, supported by the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), appointed a task force to review issues associated with baccalaureate degree access for community college students from a community college perspective. The Task Force composition represented executive, administrative, instructional, and student constituencies at the community colleges plus representatives from the Illinois Board of Higher Education (staff and university representatives) and ICCB staff.

After a review of issues surrounding access to the baccalaureate degree, the Task Force concluded that there are unmet needs within the state of Illinois that call for action. For example, working adults with family responsibilities are unable to relocate to complete baccalaureate degrees through the traditional route of enrolling on university campuses. Another example, among many identified by the Task Force, is employers calling for education beyond the applied or technical associate degree which is not readily accepted in transfer by universities in the state. These needs vary across the state and call for more than one method to address them.

The Task Force also recognized that the strong tradition of cooperation between sectors (community college, public and private, and proprietary institutions) of higher education has resulted in Illinois's stellar reputation as one of the strongest systems of higher education in the country. It believes that working together, the system, with the support of state policy makers, is capable of addressing these unmet needs through the enhancement of existing models and the implementation of new and more innovative models.

The Task Force urges all institutions of higher education in the state to recognize the necessity of meeting the needs for baccalaureate access and to accept their responsibility in addressing the needs. It encourages universities to recognize that community colleges can and must play a role as a partner in providing enhanced access to the baccalaureate. It encourages community colleges in their role as the primary advocate for higher education in their communities to actively seek enhanced partnerships with four-year institutions.

The Task Force further urges the Illinois Community College Board and the Illinois Board of Higher Education to endorse the recommendations contained within this report and to work with the General Assembly and Governor's office to assist in implementing them as soon as possible. It respectfully requests that the Boards review the progress made in implementing the recommendations on an annual basis to ascertain the degree of improvement in baccalaureate access and to take further action if the needs are not being met.

There will be necessary cost factors in providing expanded access to the baccalaureate. The Task Force took into account general financial implications for the various approaches, and understands that costs will vary considerably given the circumstances in which recommendations are implemented. The Task Force is fully aware of the economic climate in which these recommendations are being made, but believes that in the long run, it is education that will drive an improved economy for the state and the nation.

BACCALAUREATE ACCESS TASK FORCE
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